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Qasim's Short Stories: An Example of Arabic Supernatural/Ghost/Horror Story

by

Sabah H Alsowaifan

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Milan Dimic

Earle Waugh

Francis Landy

William Anselmi

Willi Braun

Issa J. Boullata

12/26/2000

Dedication

To my father and mother. To my supervisor, Dr. Milan V. Dimic. To Mr. Faisal Yousef Al Marzoq. To the Commercial Bank of Kuwait. To Kuwait University.

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on an Arabic writer of short stories, Qasim Khadir Qasim. The Kuwaiti Qasim writes supernatural, ghost and horror stories in the Arabic language. His stories are entertaining, because the reader enjoys the creative elements of the supernatural, especially the horrifying suspense. Qasim's stories are a part of the supernatural/ghost/horror genre. In general, Qasim uses techniques similar to Gothic writers (such as setting the stories in the past and in mysterious places). In particular, the influence of Edgar Allen Poe, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, William Shakespeare, and other Western writers can be seen in Qasim's work (especially in terms of evoking horror, making use of folkloric motifs, and using grotesque images). Moreover, Qasim uses internationally recognized folkloric motifs within his work, such as the motif of personified winds, a painting coming to life, and people returning from the dead to reveal murder or to demand a proper burial. In essence, because of this, his work is accessible and entertaining for many readers. However, beneath this entertaining surface, there are deeper cultural explorations and critiques. To prove this, the dissertation conducts a close analysis of three stories: "The City of Winds," "The Painting of Wishes," and "The Deserted Hut." Qasim explores in his fiction not only fear of the unknown in a supernatural sense (such as the magical forces of winds, evil spirits, and ghosts), but Qasim also explores serious cultural issues (such as the abuse of nature by man, the belief in superstition, and the exploitation of women). Essentially, Quasi uses supernatural entertainment in three ways: for escapist pleasure, to protect his cultural criticism, and to educate the reader without directly offending him or her.

The dissertation discusses and reviews the background, influences on, motifs, and themes of the genre and its writers. Then, it conducts a close interpretation of Qasim's supernatural stories as a disguised means for social commentary. It also considers the contextual, religious, cultural elements in Qasim's stories.

Hence, first it illustrates how Qasim entertains readers by placing him in the supernatural tradition and by relating him to writers such as Poe and Lovecraft. Second, it explains how Qasim uses the supernatural to make serious cultural commentary about nature, superstition, and women. Moreover, it shows that Qasim's stories contain popular folkloric motifs, but which he uses in an original way. The thesis, I hope, proves my contention that Qasim uses the supernatural genre for escapist entertainment, for serious cultural commentary, and to educate readers without offending them.

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Qasim's Short Stories:
An Example of Arabic Supernatural/Ghost/Horror Story

-"Do you believe in ghosts?"
The question struck me painfully. It reinforced my fear that Darwish had been possessed by spirits. I looked at him and found him staring wonderingly again at that hut.
-"Yes, I believe in the existence of ghosts and everything said about them."
My answer came as a key to a secret box, which Darwish had carried in his mind all these past months. Darwish started to relax, and I saw some indication of contentment in his face. He took a deep breath as if he had finally found somebody who shared, and sympathized with, his affliction.
-Qasim K. Qasim[1]

Introduction

This dissertation focuses on an Arabic writer of short stories, Qasim K. Qasim. The Kuwaiti Qasim writes supernatural, ghost and horror stories in the Arabic language. His stories are entertaining, because the reader enjoys the creative elements of the supernatural, especially the horrifying suspense. Qasim's stories are a part of the supernatural/ghost/horror genre. In general, Qasim uses techniques similar to Gothic writers (such as setting the stories in the past and in mysterious places). In particular, the influence of Edgar Allen Poe, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, and other Western writers can be seen in Qasim's work (especially in terms of evoking horror, making use of folkloric motifs, and using grotesque images). Moreover, Qasim uses internationally recognized folkloric motifs within his work, such as the motif of personified winds, a painting coming to life, and people returning from the dead to reveal murder or to demand a proper burial. In essence, because of this, his work is accessible and entertaining for many readers. However, beneath this entertaining surface, there are deeper cultural explorations and critiques. To prove this, I will

conduct a close analysis of three stories: "The City of Winds," "The Painting of Wishes," and "The Deserted Hut." Qasim explores in his fiction not only fear of the unknown in a supernatural sense (such as the magical forces of winds, evil spirits, and ghosts), but Qasim also explores serious cultural issues (such as the abuse of nature by man, the belief in superstition, and the exploitation of women). Essentially, Qasim uses supernatural entertainment in three ways: for escapist pleasure, to protect his cultural criticism, and to educate the reader without directly offending him or her.

In the dissertation, I will discuss and review the background, influences on, motifs, and themes of the genre and its writers. Then, I will conduct a close interpretation of Qasim's supernatural stories as a disguised means for social commentary. I will also consider the contextual, religious, cultural elements in Qasim's stories.

Hence, first I will illustrate how Qasim entertains readers by placing him in the supernatural tradition and by relating him to writers such as Poe and Lovecraft. Second, I will explain how Qasim uses the supernatural to make serious cultural commentary about nature, superstition, and women. Moreover, I will show that Qasim's stories contain popular folkloric motifs, in which he uses them to establish his originality. I will conduct a close reading of "The City of Winds," "The Painting of Wishes," and "The Deserted Hut." By the end of the thesis, I hope to prove my contention that Qasim uses the supernatural genre for escapist entertainment, for serious cultural commentary, and to educate readers without offense.

Definitions of Supernatural/Ghost/Horror story

In order to discuss Qasim's supernatural/ghost story as an example of Arabic tales of the supernatural, I will offer general definitions of supernatural, ghost and horror stories. In fact, there are many definitions of the supernatural, ghost, and horror story; however, I prefer to choose only some selected definitions. For my purpose, these definitions provide accurate and sufficiently comprehensive features of the genre and its sub-genres. The following three definitions, I hope, will offer a clear and distinctive representation of the supernatural story as genre, and of the ghost/horror story as its sub-genres.

In *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, the supernatural is of or relating to an order of existence beyond the visible observable universe, especially relating to God or a god, demigod, spirit, or evil force. Also, supernatural is a departing from what is usual or normal, especially, so as to appear to transcend the laws of nature. It is also attributed to an invisible agent (as a ghost or spirit). The dictionary also gives a definition of the ghost as the seat of life or intelligence: soul (give up the ghost). It is a disembodied soul, especially the soul of a dead person believed to be an inhabitant of the unseen world or to appear to the living in bodily likeness. A Ghost is also defined as a spirit or demon. The definition of horror, according to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, is a painful and intense fear, dread, or dismay (H. G. Wells said "astonishment giving place to horror on the faces of the people about me").[2] It is the quality of inspiring horror: repulsive, horrible, or dismal quality or character (Liam O'Flaherty said "contemplating the horror of their lives"). (*Merriam-*

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary) It is also the state of extreme depression or apprehension.

Another definition of the ghost is found in *The Columbia Encyclopedia*.

> The most evil apparitions are said to be those of persons who have died violent or unnatural deaths, those with guilty secrets, and those who were improperly buried. However, not all apparitions are believed to be dangerous; many, especially those associated with a particular religion, are thought to be signs of divine intervention. [3]

According to J. A. Cuddon, "supernatural story" is a term which may be applied to any sort of story which in some way makes use of ghosts, ghouls, specters, apparitions, poltergeists, good and evil spirits, and things that go bump in the night. Not to mention magic, witchcraft, marvels, talismans, the eerie atmosphere and the presence of the uncanny; anything supernatural, and beyond sensory perception; what makes the flesh creep and the hair stand on end; the spooky, the numinous; that which conveys the sense of preternatural powers. [4] In short, anything which belongs to that world so powerfully suggested by Milton in *Comus* when he wrote:

> Calling shapes and beckoning shadows dire,
> And airy tongues that syllable men's names
> On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses. [5]

Furthermore, W. K. McNeil defines the supernatural as anything that cannot be explained rationally by means of modern science and is said to be paranormal or supernatural. Moreover, the term supernatural has a wide variety of topics, including ghosts, witchcraft, second-sight, fairies, doubles, werewolves, vampires, curses,

magic, omens, and prophecies. These subjects turn up repeatedly in legends and folktales; that is, believers tell narratives in which supernatural elements are presented as fact while nonbelievers include them in stories they present as fiction, to be told simply for entertainment, but not necessarily for laughter. Supernatural creatures are not always bad. Some, such as vampires, werewolves, and trolls, are generally evil, but others, such as elves, brownies, and fairies, are often helpful.

McNeil points out that it is commonly believed that many of the supernatural creatures popular in European folklore are not found in the United States, but, even so, legends about bearwalkers and other shape-shifters, zombies, and even werewolves and vampires have been collected in the New World. Also, the legends about bigfoot seem to be a fusion of ancient European wild man traditions with Native American beliefs about hairy apelike beings. Furthermore, a vast amount of lore about witches and ghosts has been reported in the United States. These matters suggest the possibility that narratives about European supernatural beings are more common in North America than is generally believed. The failure to turn up large numbers of such tales in the United States may reflect nothing more than the biases or assumptions of collectors.

McNeil emphasizes that supernatural lore is found not only in informal oral tradition but in formal literature as well. William Shakespeare's plays, for example, are filled with ghosts and witches. Much of the horror in the Gothic tale of terror that reached its height of popularity in the nineteenth century and in the late twentieth century still had a large following, was based on supernatural elements. This genre

was presaged by the British writer Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764); its first American practitioner of any note, Charles Brockden Brown, produced several books in this style four decades later. Better known to modern audiences are Ann Radcliff, Mathew Gregory Lewis, and Charles Robert Maturon, among British authors, and Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller, Christoph Martin Wieland, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Charles Nodier and count Jan Potocki, among continental writers, all important names in literary history who helped establish a trend for this type of fiction. Throughout the nineteenth century, horror fiction was very prominent in the literary market in much of the world, and contributions were made by such authors as Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne in the United States; Aleksandr Sergeyevich Pushkin in Russia; Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffman in Germany; Theophivee Gautier and Prosper Nerimee in France In many respects, the most influential piece of horror fiction was Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which was based on folk traditions about corpses that rise up out of the tomb and suck the blood of the living. Stoker's creation, particularly as interpreted by Bela Lugosi in the 1931 film *Dracula*, has greatly shaped modern vampire lore. [6]

The second definition is the definition of the ghost story. J. A. Cuddon explains it as follows: Although there are some in verse, such as R. H. Barham's tales in *The Ingoldsby Legends*, it is usually in prose. The ghost story is a fictional narrative of variable length, in which the spirit of a person (or the spirits of persons) is no longer bound by natural laws. It manifests itself, or seems to do so either embodied in some form or disembodied, and haunts a place, person or thing as a kind of

presence. As a genre the ghost story proper does not include demonic pacts, doppelgangers, vampires, werewolves, succubi, poltergeists et al. Nor as a rule does it involve witchcraft and the prolepses of magic, or occult practices associated with such activities as Cumberlandism, exorcism, spiritualism, telekinesis, hylomancy and so forth. (Cuddon, 342)

Once more, according to McNeil, ghosts are disembodied spirits, and they generally are thought to refer to the human soul after death, although there are also animal ghosts. The words *revenant, wraith, specter, apparition, phantom,* and *spirit* are all used to describe essentially the same phenomenon. Returning dead are thought to come back in several forms. They may return in the same body they had while alive, they may appear in spectral form, or they may be invisible and known only by their deeds, noise, or mischief. Moreover, belief in the dead returning in unearthly form dates back to the beginnings of human history; some of the earliest written records - cuneiform clay tablets- contain legends about apparitions that even then were quite ancient. Classics of ancient literature, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* the *Odyssey,* and the *Aeneid,* contain accounts of ghosts, and they have maintained a presence in literature ever since. Until the early nineteenth century, literary ghost stories were little more than slightly embellished accounts of reported ghostly sightings; in the 1820s, such narratives matured into a distinct literary form, with Sir Walter Scott's "Wandering Willie's Tale" (1824) being the genre's first English masterpiece.

Also, McNeil stresses the fact that when we are thinking about ghosts, many people envision an old abandoned house with loose, banging shutters and doors that seem to be closed by an unseen hand. Houses are the favorite hangout of ghosts, but they also frequently appear in various other places, including battlefields, mines, highways, boats, graveyards, gallows, and wells. Usually tied to a specific place, some wraiths carry their haunting farther afield. Generally they move about by horseback or automobile rather than by supernatural means. This activity has a lengthy tradition throughout much of Europe, where stories about traveling ghosts were reported at least as early as the 1660s. Most ghosts return for a specific reason: to reveal the whereabouts of hidden treasure, to complete business left unfinished at the time of death, to find some forgotten possession, to protest their own unjust execution, because the ghost committed suicide, or because it has a restless soul. Most ghosts are harmless to anyone with a clear conscience, but some are malicious and return to torture their victims eternally. Moreover, there are ghosts of dead lovers or husbands or wives who return to haunt their unfaithful sweetheart or spouse; parents come back to make life unpleasant for their children; a dead person returns to slay a wicked man or woman, to take revenge on the one who murdered, injured, or cheated him or her in life, or to punish someone mistreating a relative of the spirit or who has disturbed the dead person's grave or stolen part of its corpse. Most ghosts have specific motivations for their return. Besides, there are, of course, numerous modern ghost legends, the most popular ghost narrative in the Western world being the vanishing hitchhiker. Versions of this tale tell the story of a driver picking up a hitchhiker on a lonely

highway; the mysterious passenger then vanishes seemingly into thin air when the driver arrives at the presumed destination. This legend can be traced back well over a century and has inspired a number of movies and at least two popular songs. [7]

The horror story, according to J. A. Cuddon, is a fictional narrative, usually in prose of variable length. Its purpose is to shock or even frighten the reader, and/or perhaps to induce a feeling of repulsion or loathing. He explains that the word *horror* derives from Latin *horrere* " to make the hair stand on end, tremble, shudder". The horror story is about murder, suicide, torture, fear and madness. Horror stories are also concerned with ghosts, vampires, *doppelgangers*, succubi, incubi, poltergeists, demonic pacts, diabolic possession and exorcism, witchcraft, spiritualism, voodoo, lycanthropy and the macabre, plus such occult or quasi-occult practices as telekinesis and hylomancy. Some horror stories are serio-comic or comic-grotesque, but nonetheless alarming or frightening for that. (Cuddon, 388)

The Structure of the Supernatural Story

Before moving to the structure of the supernatural story, one has to mention the development of the psychological supernatural/ghost/horror story. As Pamela Search explains,

> the horror tale really came into its triumph at the beginning of the twentieth century, probably because of the loosening up of the nineteenth century moral attitude towards fiction. Walter de la Mare wrote inconclusive tales of the supernatural, which created an unfulfilled sense of suspense in the reader. Mary Shelley's horror tale *Frankenstein* was for many years the lone example of science fiction. But with Poe's *The Man Who was Used*, *The Descent into the Maelstrom* and *The Sphinx* the genre gained a surer footing.[8]

Now, the method of narration has become particularly important to the success of the modern short story of the supernatural. As Pamela Search noted, that it is no longer enough for the writer to invent a fearful spook and to lard his narrative with appalling detail. He (the writer) must construct his tale and time his climax in such a way as to convince the skeptical twentieth–century reader, "to produce in him the state that Coleridge called the willing suspension of disbelief ." She explains further:

> A writer can start his ghost story in one of two ways, either by referring, directly or indirectly by means of gloomy atmosphere, to the supernatural nature of the end, or else with a causal introduction containing no hint of the supernatural at all. The first method, which was popular among the earlier nineteenth–century writers of eerie fiction, aimed at chilling the reader's spine from the outset. (Search, 18)

Pamela Search laid out four fundamental methodological components for studying and examining the supernatural/ghost story. These are: "climax,"

"language," "the feeling of fear," and "the unconscious enjoyment of living for a while."

1- The *climax* of any ghost story is its most important feature. When the apparition or supernatural agent make only "one" appearance this automatically becomes the climax, but when, as is often the case, the apparition appears several times, then the writer must ensure that its final appearance brings with it "a true sense" of climax. An author can do either, by withholding its identity until the last appearance (as in Marjorie Bowen's *Crown Derby Plate*), or by making it "attack" the haunted victim (as in Gabriel Harvey's *Beast with Five Fingers*), or by "incorporating" in the climax some kind of "explanation" that makes the supernatural interference more "plausible" (as in M. R. James's *The Treasure of Abbot Thomas*). The latter type of climax is often used by recent writers for it helps in the business of "convincing" the reader. (Search, 18)

2- The language used by many writers of supernatural fiction, far from being dramatic and "fraught with fraughtness," is sober often to the point of being ponderous. This seems to me a pity, although it is certainly a good thing that writers have forsaken alarming, highly colored narrative in favor of a matter-of-fact style designed to play its part in convincing the skeptical reader. Perhaps in time the tendency to use the clichés and circumlocutions which characterize so much of supernatural fiction to date will be replaced by the unstilted language we have come to expect from contemporary writing. (Search, 19)

3- The perpetual recurrence of the supernatural in literature throughout the ages reflects one of the most fundamental emotions of man, the feeling of fear. There is no fear greater than the fear of that which cannot be fully understood, and in spite of education and culture and science there remains a hard core of superstition, a deep-rooted fear of incomprehensible supernatural powers, present in all pepole. It is to this basic hereditary emotion that the writers of supernatural fiction appeal. (Search, 20)

Then, Pamela Search indicates that there are several ways in which authors of supernatural tales can make this appeal. One of the oldest ways used by Shakespeare in *Hamlet* and, used frequently by the earlier short story writers, is the appeal to man's fear of retribution by means of the revenge ghost and the specter with a mission. Modern writers, on the other hand, frequently choose horror symbols which are common to nightmare and so have the psychological ring of truth. The reaction of the modern reader is often not "Thank goodness this isn't me" but "Good heavens this might happen to me." This is, of course, particularly true of the modern psychological ghost story. (Search, 20)

4- The popularity of supernatural fiction is perhaps partly explained by the fact that although people enjoy (and in some ways require) spine-chilling thrills, they also like to be able to put down a book and reassure themselves that "it's only a story." This bolsters up their sophisticated attempt to deny the reality of supernatural forces and ignore the superstitious fear that is in them. But deeper still there is probably the unconscious enjoyment of living for a while in a world which only a few generations ago would have been our own - a world of witchcraft and black magic, fairies and

goblins, when the supernatural was too much a reality to be reasoned away. (Search, 20)

Supernatural/Ghost/Horror in World Literature

One can categorize the Supernatural story into two sections: supernatural in verse, and supernatural in prose. In verse, one may mention the supernatural elements in *Beowulf, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Orfeo,* Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Comus,* Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel,* Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci,* E. A. Poe's *The Raven,* Browning's *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came,* Walter de la Mare's *The Listeners,* W. W. Gibson's *Flannan Isle,* Alfred Noyes's *Sherwood,* Vernon Watkins's *The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd,* as well as a large number of ballads such as, *The Wee Wee Man, The Wife of Usher's Well, The Daemon Lover.* In prose, there are two classic collections of supernatural stories, *The Arabian Nights* and the brothers Grimm *Fairy Tales.* Mention should also be made of Basile's, Straparola's and Perrault's older collection of fairy stories; Defoe's *True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs Veal*; Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*; Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*; M. G. "Monk" Lewis's *The Monk and The Castle Spectre*; C. R. Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer;* Mary Shelley's, *Frankenstein*; some of Hoffmann's *Tales;* Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*; some of Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*; James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner;* Dostoievski's *The Double;* Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*; Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll an Mr Hyde* and *The Bottle Imp;* Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray;* Ambrose Bierce's *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*; W. W. Jacobs's *The Monkey's Paw;* Sheridan Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly* (a collection which contains the famous *Green Tea);* Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw.* Plus a large number of stories by French and Russian nineteenth-century writers such as principally Gautier, Merimee,

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Huysmans, Balzac, Pushkin, Gogol, and Turgenev. More recent writers of note who have made memorable use of supernatural elements are: G. K. Chesterton, Walter de la Mare, Algernon Blackwood, H. P. Lovecraft, W. F. Harvey, A M. Burrage, A. N. L. Munby, Georges Bernanos, L. P. Hartley, M. R. James (his *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* is considered to be a classic piece), Dennis Wheatley and Ray Bradbury. (Cuddon, 883)

Nonetheless, the tale of the supernatural can trace its origins back to the roots of the early stages of Western and other civilizations. Although it started with the ghost in Gilgamesh, it is the civilizations of the Greeks and Romans that advanced and improved the short tale of the supernatural. Since then the supernatural/ghost story has found its place in world literature.[9] Examples of this kind would be found in *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, and Biblical narratives about ghosts such as in the book of Samuel 28. But, before discussing the development of the ghost story, it is useful to tackle the whole subject of the supernatural/ghost/horror within human cultures, for the literature often reflects wider societal beliefs, and is the written evidence for profound influences and beliefs of large masses of people that may have never read a "supernatural/ghost story."

Many ancient civilizations and cultures assumed that the ghost was in fact a normal and functioning part of the world. It was not necessarily "evil", or "good" for that matter, for it was just as likely to display the whole range of human frailties that its live counterpart experienced. This is in contrast to our dominant world view today. The Egyptians believed in the literal existence of ghosts. As the pyramids testify so

magnificently, life *after* death was far more important to the Egyptian Pharaohs than the mortal lives they were currently enjoying.

The Greeks and Romans, in turn, believed in the existence of apparitions, at all times, even among educated people. In her book *Greek and Roman Ghost Stories*, Lacy Collison-Morley notes that the younger Pliny, for instance, writes to ask his friend Sura for his opinion as to whether ghosts have a real existence, with a form of their own, and are of divine origin, or whether they are merely "empty air, owing their definite shape to our superstitious fears."[10]

The Romans, also, believed in deeply personal and human deities, with all the concomitant faults we associate with humanity. So the ghost, which they believed in just as literally, was even more human, being more closely related to the actual human form. The Roman process of turning their dead Emperors into gods by decree, while a trifle bizarre to the modern sensibility, fitted perfectly logically into a world in which the supernatural and the natural worlds went easily together. Indeed, there was little difference between them. One could slide between the natural and the supernatural, and even into the deified.

The Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, while perhaps standing out because of their influence and the numerous surviving records and features of their civilizations that we can study, were not unusual within ancient cultures. Death was far more part of life than we find today. Modern medicine, modern sanitation and generally improved living conditions have banished death, at least within the Western world, to a little-discussed periphery that we all know is waiting for us, but which is avoided at

all costs. To discuss it is to somehow make it real. In the ancient world, and, as we shall shortly discuss, within cultures that maintain a traditional outlook, death is an inherent part of life. The Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans were surrounded by death constantly, both through infectious disease and as warring nations. The average woman would stand a frighteningly high chance of dying in childbirth or in complications soon thereafter. There is a belief in some supernatural existence beyond death, both in the form of some afterlife *and* in some life that still surrounds us and interacts actively with us. The ghost was a sensible proposition for those who, while they may have been more intimate with the concept of death than the average modern western individual, were still seeking a way of avoiding the idea of imminent oblivion that it seemed to hold.

Traditional societies in some of the more remote areas of the world today, such as New Guinea and Borneo, believe in an active relationship between ghosts and the living. The *shaman* in many such cultures is a vital link between the dead and the living.[11] He or she acts as both a medium for and an embodiment of the ghosts of dead ancestors. People will ask their dead family members for advice on the most ordinary of matters and will seemingly receive it through the communications of the shaman of the village. It is no accident that these cultures are far more linked to a pristine natural world with all the benefits and threats associated with such a life than we are in the Western world, or, as we shall see, although to a lesser extent, the Arab world.

Western culture does not have a literal shaman, although to a lesser extent some religious leaders/advisers and some creative artists act in this role. The writer acts as a link between the mundane, often humdrum lives that we lead, and the sense that most people have that there is something beyond this, or, perhaps more frighteningly, that we are surrounded by a supernatural world that only occasionally reveals its true nature and power. In literature, it is in *Gilgamesh* that we find the first literary ghost, and then, within the Christian tradition, we have the Son of God himself, which is the most illustrious spirit in history.[12] Later, Chaucer took up the idea with his two inset ghost stories, both originally related by Cicero and Valerius, which are part of Chauntecleer's disquisition to Pertelote in *The Nun's Priest Tale*. These ghosts are remnants of the old classical traditions. Both the author(s) of Gilgamesh and Chaucer lived in worlds in which belief in the supernatural was an absolute, as was belief in religion.[13] The rigid hierarchy of the medieval world did not allow for the ambiguity of meaning and import that we find in perhaps the first "modern" ghost: the ghost of Hamlet's father in Shakespeare's great play *Hamlet*. But before discussing Shakespeare, one has to mention the oriental influence on the genre.

Arabic and Islamic Tradition: *The Arabian Nights* (as an Entertainment) and the Supernatural

Before discussing the subject of the supernatural in both Arabic and Islamic traditions, it is important to mention here that the coming discussion is relevant to the proper understanding of Qasim's work. In light of reading and researching the subject of the supernatural and, more narrowly, the ghost in literature, I came across a book by one of the leading authorities in the field, Pamela Search. Her view in suggesting a future of comparative research and investigation of an old and almost forgotten genre came to appeals to me and challenged me to advance this study. She observes that the sudden comfort of English life in the eighteenth century gave people more leisure than they had enjoyed for hundreds of years. According to Search, the reading public grew fast and the first lending libraries came into being during the eighteenth century. Men and women, probably finding life boring, began to seek the stimulus of fictional adventure and danger. Thus, aside from mainstream English literature after 1700, there arose two new trends in fiction: one, the Oriental and two, the Gothic. Each new trend was a response to the growing demand for excitement in reading matter. (Search,7)

Search also calls for a comparative study in the field of the supernatural literature:

> The Oriental trend, heralded by the publication of the translations of *The Arabian Nights* in 1704-17, was in tune with the current fashion for things from the East.[14] The Gothic trend followed later-tales of mystery and horror generously spiced with ruined Gothic castles, hooting owls, eerie graveyards, clanking chairs, creaking hinges and all

> the other paraphernalia of ghostly apparitions. This fashion was established by Horace Walpole with his famous novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), although he was not the first to experiment with this type of fiction. It is possible that he and other writers of the Gothic horror tale were influenced by the work of the French writer Abbe Prevost, author of *Manon Lescaut*, who had already used the now familiar trappings of the old-fashioned ghost story to great effect. (Search, 7)

In her introduction to her well-known anthology *The Supernatural in the English Short Story*, Pamela Search points out the importance of *The Arabian Nights* as a literary source. As a leading scholar in the literature of the supernatural, Search, in my opinion, established a compelling reason for examining and conducting critical research on the subject of the supernatural/ghost in literature.

The Thousand and One Nights offers an intriguing glimpse into the often ignored world of Arabic narrative literature from which the tales of Qasim spring. Husain Haddawy, who translated *The Arabian Nights* based on the text of the fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript, which was edited by Muhsin Mahdi, describes, in his introduction, the quality and the aesthetics of *The Arabian Nights*.[15]

> The essential quality of these tales lies in their success in interweaving the unusual, the extraordinary, the marvelous, and the supernatural into the fabric of everyday life. Animals discourse and give lessons in moral philosophy; normal men and women consort or struggle with demons and, like them, change themselves or anyone else into any form they please; and humble people lead a life full of accidents and surprises, drinking with an exhaled caliph here or sleeping with a gorgeous girl there. Yet both the usual incidents and the extraordinary coincidences are nothing but the web and weft of Divine Providence, in a world in which people often suffer but come out all

> right at the end. They are enriched by the pleasure of a marvelous adventure and a sense of wonder, which makes life possible.[16]

The *Arabian Nights* generously supplies my study of the modern supernatural, exemplified by Qasim's works, with crucial literary and historical background. *The Arabian Nights* is a central collection of Oriental literature that contains many aspects of imaginative supernatural tales. For instance, Aladdin discovers a magical lamp which releases a genie and grants three wishes. The magic is mysterious and the tale is full of exciting and imaginative adventure. Essentially, Aladdin's adventures are escapist entertainment, where readers can get lost in the fun of the supernatural fantasy. In addition, many of the tales in *The Arabian Nights* have a moral lesson; moreover, the text as a whole has a moral purpose which is combined with its entertainment function. Shahrazad is the central narrator of the piece and she is telling stories to save her life and educate the king. Concerning Shahrazad, Ferdowsi in *World Masterpieces* says:

> her motive throughout is the single and compelling one of preventing the destruction of herself and the other young women of her community. The formulaic exchange between Shahrazad, Shahrayar, and Dinarzad that is repeated each dawn and evening reminds us that Shahrazad is not telling tales simply to while away the time. (*World Masterpieces*, 926-927)

Hence, Shahrazad functions as not just an entertainer, but also as an educator, and even a healer. Ferdowsi goes on to explain this in the following manner:

> The image of Shahrazad deftly employing her skills as a narrator to buy

> her life a day at a time has captured the fancy of all who have read the *Nights*, but there may be more to her tales than an endlessly deferred conclusion. That is, her tales can also be read as a means of healing the wound inflicted on him (the Emperor) by his wife's infidelity, and of teaching him that not all women wish him ill. (*World Masterpieces*, 926)

In a sense, by using his tales to explore serious cultural issues through the guise of the supernatural, Qasim echoes *The Arabian Nights* themselves. In other words, although Qasim is directly influenced by western writers, Qasim is also following in the Arabic tradition of *The Arabian Nights*. By dealing with serious issues such as women, patriarchy, respecting natural forces, and so on, Qasim is a modern Shahrazad, telling tales so as to heal his culture.

The subject of supernatural/ghost/horror is not fully explored in modern Arabic literature; however, I should mention here a view of an Arabic scholar in the subject of the supernatural and folktale in the Arabic tradition. Fatme Sharafeddine Hassan explains that a large number of Arabic legends, folktales, and myths reflect the culture's history, social customs, morals, values, and religious beliefs. Since the Arabs share the same geographical conditions, historical experiences, and language, it is quite difficult to specify the origin of Arabic legends and folktales. Then, she continues, a reader of Arabic literature may find different versions of the same stories in various Arabic countries. For instance, the folktale "Clever Hassan" from Palestine is equivalent to "Abu Hajlan" from Syria and to "Mhammad Belhajjala" from Tunisia. Although the versions differ slightly, the moral behind the tales is the same. Arabic tales share many characteristics. The stories display the social values that the Arabs

have in common and discusses the position and roles of men and women in society. Faith in God is usually expressed through the hero, who uses his belief to achieve his main task. An all-powerful King is also depicted and supernatural elements are a very important component of most Arabic tales and legends.[17]

Fatme Hassan points out that since the tribal structure was the nucleus of social and political life for a very long period in Arabic history, the values of such a culture influenced the folktales and legends. Very often, hospitality and kindness to guests and strangers is essential for survival in the desert. Values such as courage, honesty, honor, hospitality, generosity, and loyalty are emphasized. Moreover, the hero is defined by characteristics such as pride, bravery in war, protecting the weak, and helping the poor. She also explains the role of woman in Arabic societies in which a woman is portrayed in tales and legends as a weak person who needs protection by her man, such as her father, brother, son, husband, or uncle. Most of the time a woman is described as a housewife who does not have the right to make, or even share in, important decisions. She is accused of not being able to keep her husband's secrets, since she is always expected to gossip with neighbors and relatives regarding all matters. Thus, she might destroy her husband's plans. The woman's honor is in her virginity before getting married, and in her loyalty to her husband afterwards.

Fatme Hassan continues to point out the relation between the hero of the supernatural and the authority, whether it is a religious or a monarch, Islam, God, or King. Fatme Hassan stresses that Arabs' faith and belief in God is strongly reflected in folktales passed down the generations. In a large number of these tales, the hero is

said to act according to God's will. For instance, a poor man accepts his poverty because it is his destiny decided by God. God may answer the wishes of good people, such as granting a child or bestowing wealth. In addition, God also punishes the evil characters that cause trouble for the main protagonists. On the other hand, the King is also an extremely powerful figure. In most stories, he is the ultimate ruler whose will is never questioned by the public. The king possesses slaves and has total power over anyone in his country. He can marry any woman he desires, can kill people without justifying his act, and can make people rich or poor whenever he decides.

Then, Fatme Hassan differentiates between two forces of the supernatural in Arabic/Islamic tradition by stating that the supernatural element is a very important aspect in ancient Arabic literature. Jinn, Jinniyeh, Ifreet, Ghouls, Ghouleh, Giants, and Angels are some of the supernatural creatures that appear frequently. There are two kinds of forces that control human beings: good forces, including God and angels, and evil forces, such as the Jinn and Ghouls. Good forces are thought to be more powerful than evil forces, but not powerful enough to eliminate them. In general, Arabic folktales and legends are very violent. There are many scenes in which storytellers describe fights and methods of killing very bluntly, regardless of the age group of the listeners. In addition to supernatural elements, Arabic folktales include magical elements that, most of the time, help the hero achieve his goals.

Fatme Hassan illustrates that there are many examples of magic elements, which include a ring, three hairs of a horse, a crystal ball, slippers, and a flying carpet. It is interesting to note that although folktales might include supernatural and magical

elements, they are usually based on real life events that stem from the Arabic culture. For instance, social values such as courage and honesty are often preserved in the legends and folktales. Imagination and creativity in these tales add to their beauty and escapist capacity without minimizing the influence of real life events. An interesting element of the stories is the use of formulaic numbers that still have spiritual meanings for many people in the Arab world. For example, the numbers three, seven and forty are very meaningful to Arabs in general. In many of the tales those numbers have been used to describe various aspects in the development of events. Expressions such as "seven days and nights," "three chances," and "forty doors to open" are commonly used. In addition, many Arabic folktales lack the element of logic. Events might be clearly presented, but sometimes little details that clarify parts of the story are missing. For instance, in "Clever Hassan," the hero suddenly possesses a magic ring that helps him in his troubles. The story doesn't mention where the ring came from or why Hassan didn't use it before. Fatme Hassan concludes that most of the tales have morals that teach the listener or reader right from wrong. Some of the common morals are "patience is the key for success," "satisfaction and contentment keep you out of trouble," "loyalty is always rewarded," and "stealing is usually discovered and punished." These lessons are meant to enhance and preserve the set of values that comprise Arab culture.

Comparatively, in modern Arabic literary tradition, Arabic writers and critics usually ignore the topics of supernatural/ghost stories and adventurous tales. In spite of this, I would like to mention some works in modern Arabic literary tradition that

contain aspects of the supernatural and ghost story, such as, Najib Mahfuz's *Children of Gebelawi*, Yahya Haqqi's *The Saint's Lamp*, Mahmmod Taymur's "Hide Out 13," and Ghada El Saman's *The Square Moon*.

There are many reasons why Arabic critics have avoided this kind of literature and why Arabic writers generally have focused on other genres of literature. One of the reasons is the fact that these fairy tales/ghost stories often contained sexual references that seem to undermine religious authority, such as the tales of *The Arabian Nights*. Examples of sexual and religious references can be found throughout the collection. For instance, this passage illustrates the controversial and provocative undertone:

> The following night Shahrazad said:
> It is related, O happy King, that the **girl** who was the **mistress** of the **house** said to the **caliph**:
> O **Commander** of the **Faithful**, the young man placed the **Quran** in the **prayer niche** and seated me **by his side**. When I looked at him, I saw a face as beautiful as the full moon, like the one for whom the poet said:
> The stargazer one night charted the stars
> And saw his fair from shining like a moon
> Who vied in brilliance with the hiding sun.
> And left in darkness the bewildered moon.[18]

The content and description in this passage is a serious offence to Muslims. For instance, the caliph romances his mistress close to the most sacred book of Islam.

In Islamic tradition, the word (s) "Jinn", feminine Jinniyah (Jinya), plural Jinn are used in Arabic and Islamic folklore to refer to a spirit or demon which is endowed

with supernatural power. In ancient belief the jinn were associated with the destructive forces of nature. In Islamic tradition they were corporeal spirits similar to men in appearance but having certain supernatural powers, especially those of changing in size and shape. Capable of both good and evil, the jinn were popular in literatures of the Middle East, notably in the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights*. (*The Columbia Encyclopedia*)

According to Islam, the prophet Muhammad was a sincere believer in the existence of good and evil Jinn (Genii), and has left a record of his belief in the chapter of the holy *Qur'an*, entitled *Surat Al*-Jinn. It opens thus:

> Say: It hath been revealed to me that a company of Jinn listened and said: Verily,we have heard a marvelous discourse. It guideth to the truth; wherefore believed in it, and we will not henceforth join any *being* with our Lord. And he may the majesty of our Lord be exalted- hath taken no spouse neither hath he any offspring. But the foolish among us hath spoken of God that which is unjust: And we verily thought that no one amongst men or jinn would have uttered a lie against God. There are indeed people among men, who have sought for refuge unto people among jinn: but they only increased their folly: and they thought as ye think, that God would not raise any from the dead. And the Heavens did we essay, but found them filled with a mighty garrison, and with flaming darts; and we sat on some of the seats to listen, but whoever listeneth findeth an ambush ready for him of flaming darts. (*The Holy Qur'an*, Surat Al-Jinn,34)

According to a tradition from the Prophet, this species consists of five orders, namely, Jann (who are the least powerful of all), Jinn, Shaitans (or devils), Ifrits, and Marids. The last are the most powerful; and the Jann are transformed Jinn, like as

certain apes and swine were transformed men. It must, however, be remarked that the terms Jinn and Jann are generally used indiscriminately as names of the whole species, whether good or bad, and that the former term is the more common. Also, that Shaitan (Satan) is commonly used to signify any evil genius. An Ifrit (demon, devil, fiend or afreet) is a powerful evil genius. A Marid is also an evil genius of the most powerful class. The Jinn (also generally speaking evil) are called by the Persians Deves, the most powerful evil Jinn, Narahs (which signifies " males," though they are said to be males and females); the good Jinn, "Piris", though this term is commonly applied to females. In a tradition from the Prophet, it is said, the Jann were created of a smokeless fire. This word which signifies "a smokeless fire" has, sometimes, been misunderstood by some as meaning " the flame of fire." Al-Jauhari, a Muslim scholar, in *The Sihah* (The Corrector) says that of this fire was the Shaitan or Iblis created. Al-Jann is sometimes used as a name for Iblis, as in the following verse of the Qur'an, "And the Jann (the father of the Jinn, i.e. Iblis) we had created before (i.e. before the creation of Adam) of the fire of the Samum (i.e. of the fire without smoke)". (Qur'an, Surah xv. 27) Jann also signifies "a serpent," as in other passages of the Qur'an, and is used in the same book as synonymous with Jinn. There are several apparently contradictory traditions from the Prophet, which are approved by what has been above stated; in one it is said that Iblis was the father of all the Jann and Shaitan Jann being here synonymons with Jinn; in another, that Jann was the father of all the Jinn, here Jinn being used as a name for Iblis. Moreover, Al-Qazwini, another Muslim scholar points out:

> "It is held that the Jinn are aerial animals, with transparent bodies, which can assume various forms. People differ in opinion respecting these beings; some consider the Jinn and Shaitans as unruly men, but these persons are of the Mu'tazilahs (a sect of Muslim freethinkers). And, some hold that God, whose name be exalted, created the angels of the light of fire, and the Jinn of its flame (but this is at disagreement with the general opinion), and the Shaitans of its smoke (which is also at variance with the common opinion). Moreover, all these kinds of beings are usually invisible to men, but that they assume what forms they please, and when their form becomes condensed they are visible. [19]

This above passage illustrates several descriptions of Genii in *The Arabian Nights*, where the form of the monster is often at first undefined, or like an enormous pillar, and then gradually assumes a human shape and less gigantic size.

It is said that God created the Jann (or Jinn) two thousand years before Adam, and that there are believers and infidels and every sect among them, as among human. Some people believe that the prophet Yusuf (Joseph) was sent to the Jinn; others, believe that seventy apostles were sent, before Muhammad, to Jinn and men together. It is commonly believed that the Jinn before Adam's time were governed by forty kings, to each of whom the Arab writers give the name of Sulaiman (or Solomon); and that they derive their titles from the last of these, who was called Jann ibn Jann, and who, some say, built the Pyramids of Egypt. The following account is given by al-Qazwini:

> It is related in histories that a race of Jinn in ancient times, before the creation of Adam, inhabited the earth, and covered it, the land and the sea, and the plains and the mountains; and the favors of God were multiplied upon them, and they had government, and prophecy, and

> religion and law; but they transgressed and offended, and opposed their prophets, and made wickedness to abound in the earth whereupon God, whose name be exalted, sent against them an army of angels, who took possession of the earth, and drove away the Jinn to the regions of the islands, and made many of them prisoners; and of those who were made prisoners was Azazil (afterwards called Iblis, from his despair), and a slaughter was made among them. At that time, Azazil was young; he grew up among the angels (and probably for that reason was called one of them), and became learned in their knowledge, and assumed the government, of them; and his days were prolonged until he became their chief and thus it continued for a long time, until the affair between him and Adam happened, as God, whose name be exalted, hath said, "When we said unto the Angels, Worship ye Adam, and all worshipped except Iblis" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Jinn, 49), who was one of the Jinn. (Gätje, 87)

Iblis, we are told by another authority, was sent as a governor upon the earth, and judged among the Jinn a thousand years, after which he went into heaven, and remained employed in worship until the creation of Adam. It is disputed whether he was of the angels or of the Jinn. There are three opinions on this point: (1) That he was of the angels, from a tradition from Ibn Abbas. (2) That he was of the Shaitans (or evil Jinn), as it is said in the Qur'an, "except Iblis, who was one of the Jinn"; this was the opinion of Hassan Al-Basri. (3) That he was neither of the angels nor of the Jinn, but created alone of fire. Ibn Abbas founds his opinion on the same text from which Hassan Al-Basri derives his: " When we said unto the angels, worship ye Adam, and all worshipped except Iblis, who was one of the Jinn". (Qur'an, Surat Al-Jinn) Al-Basri explains by saying that the most noble and honorable among the angels

are called " the Jinn," because they are veiled from the eyes of the other angels on account of their superiority; and that Iblis was one of these Jinn. He adds that he had the government of the lowest heaven and of the earth, and was called the Ta'us (literary Peacock) of the angels; and that there was not a spot in the lowest heaven but he had prostrated himself upon it. But when the Jinn rebelled upon the earth, God sent a troop of angels, who drove them to the islands and mountains, and Iblis being with pride, and refusing to prostrate himself before Adam, God transformed him into a Shaitan.

Again, according to Islamic and Arabic traditions, Iblis and all the Shaitans are distinguished from the other Jinn by a longer existence. The Shaitans are the children of Iblis, and only die with him; whereas the other Jinn die before him, though they may live many centuries. Also, other people believe that Iblis and many other evil Jinn are to survive mankind, but they are to die before the general resurrection, as also even the angels, the last of whom will be the Angel of Death, Izra'il. Yet not all the evil Jinn are to live for long. Many of them are killed by shooting stars (shihab), hurled at them from heaven. Many also are killed by other Jinn and, some even by men. The fire of which the Jinn is created circulates in his veins, in place of blood; therefore, when he receives a mortal wound, this fire, issuing from his veins, generally consumes him to ashes.

Some Jinn are peaceable. They also eat and drink, and proliferate their species, sometimes in conjunction with human beings, and they are different from the angels. Among the evil Jinn are distinguished the five sons of their chief, Iblis;

namely, Tir, who brings about calamities, losses, and injuries; Al-A'war, who encourages debauchery; Sut, who suggests lies ; Dasim, who causes hatred between man and wife; and Zalambur, who presides over places of traffic. (Britannica.com Inc, 1999)

The most common forms and habitations or places of resort of the Jinn should be described. The following traditions from the Prophet Muhammad are to the purpose:

> The Jinn are of various shapes, having the forms of serpents, scorpions, lions, wolves, jackals, etc. The Jinn are of three kinds, one on the land, one on the sea, and one in the air. The Jinn consist of forty troops, each troop consisting of six hundred thousand. Also, The Jinn are of three kinds: one have wings and fly; another are snakes and dogs; and the third move about from place to place like men. Domestic snakes are asserted to be Jinn on the same authority. (Al-Jauhari, *Al-Sihah*)

In the early stage of Islam, the Prophet ordered his followers to kill serpents and scorpions if they intruded at prayers; but on other occasions, he seems to have required first to admonish them to depart, and then, if they remained, to kill them. Yet it is related that Ayishah (one of the Prophet's wives) having killed a serpent in her chamber, was alarmed by a dream, and feared that it might have been a Muslim Jinni. Thereafter, she was understood that she was obligated to give to charity, as an expiation, twelve thousand dirhams (about 450 U.S.), the price of the blood of a Muslim. The Jinn are said to appear to mankind most commonly in the shapes of serpents, dogs, cats, or human beings. In the last case they are sometimes of the stature of men, and sometimes of a size enormously gigantic. If good, they are

generally magnificently handsome; if evil, horribly hideous. They become invisible at pleasure, or suddenly disappear in the earth or air, or through a solid wall. Many Muslims in the present day profess to have seen and held intercourse with them.[20]

The Zauba'ah, which is a whirlwind that raises the sand or dust in the form of a pillar of prodigious height, often seen sweeping across the deserts and fields, is believed to be caused by the flight of an evil genii. To defend themselves from a Jinn thus (riding in the whirlwind), the Arabs often exclaim, Hadid (Iron) as the Jinn are supposed to have a great dread of that metal. A similar superstition prevails with respect to the waterspout at sea. For example, the Arab when they pour water on the ground, or enter a bath, or let down a bucket into a well say, "Permission ye blessed." Moreover, on the birth of Muhammad, they continue, however, to rise to the confines of the lowest heaven, and there listening to the conversation of the angels respecting things decreed by God. (Ibn Hisham,Sira)

What the Prophet Muhammad said of Iblis in the following tradition, applies also to the evil Jinn:

> His chief abode [among men] is the bath; his chief places of resort are the markets and junctures of roads; his food is whatever is killed without the name of God being pronounced over it; his drink, whatever is intoxicating; his Mu'azzin, the mizmar (a musical pipe), i.e. any musical instrument; his Qur'an, poetry; his written character, the marks made in geomancy; his speech, falsehood; his snares are women. (Al-Jauhari, *Al-Sihah*, Hadith Al-Jinn)

A similar superstition, a relic of ancient Egyptian credulity, still prevails among the people of Cairo. It is believed that each quarter of this city has its peculiar guardian genius, or Agathodamon, which has the form of a serpent.

According to Islam, some of the Jinn are Muslims, and others infidels. The good acquit themselves of the imperative duties of religion, namely, prayers, almsgiving, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and pilgrimage to Mecca and Mount Arafat, but in the performance of these duties they are generally invisible to human beings. Furthermore, Muslims believe that Sulaiman Ibn Da'ud (Solomon, the son of David) obtained absolute power over the Jinn. He did this by virtue of a most wonderful charm, which is said to have come down to him from heaven. It was a sealing ring, upon which was engraved "the most great name" of God, and was partly composed of brass and partly of iron. With the brass he stamped his written commands to the good Jinn; with the iron those to the evil Jinn or devils. Over both orders he had unlimited power, as well as over the birds and the winds, and, as is generally said, the wild beasts. By virtue of this name, engraved on his ring, Sulaiman compelled the Jinn to assist in building the temple of Jerusalem.

The injuries that are related to have been inflicted upon human beings by evil genii are of various kinds. Genii are said to have often carried off beautiful women, whom they have forcibly kept as their wives or concubines. Malicious or disturbed genii are asserted often to station themselves on the roofs, or at the windows, of houses, and to throw down bricks and stones on persons passing by. (Qasim's "City of Winds" has similar details, 26) When they take possession of an uninhabited

house, they seldom fail to persecute terribly any person who goes to reside in it. They are also very apt to pilfer provisions. Many Muslims secure their property from such depredations by repeating words such as, " In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful!" on locking the doors of their houses, rooms, or closets, and on covering the bread-basket, or anything containing food. During the month of Ramadan, the evil geniis are believed to be confined in prison, and therefore, on the last night of that month, with the same view, women sometimes repeat the words above mentioned, and sprinkle salt upon the floors of the apartments of their houses.

In Arabian mythology, several creatures are generally believed to be of inferior orders of the Jinn. One of these is the Ghul, which is commonly regarded as a kind of Shaitan, or evil genii, that eats men, and is also described by some as a Jinn, or an enchanter, who assumes various forms. The Ghuls are said to appear in the forms of various animals, and of human beings, and in many monstrous shapes, to haunt burial grounds and other sequestered spots. They also feed upon dead human bodies and kill and devour any human creature who has the misfortune to fall in their way, whence the term " Ghul" is applied to any cannibal. It appears that " Ghul" is, properly speaking, a name only given to a female demon of the kind above described; the male is called "Qutrub." It is said that these beings, and the Ghaddar, or Gharrar, and other similar creatures, which will presently be mentioned, are the offspring of Iblis and of a wife whom God created for him of the fire of the Samum (which here signifies, as in an instance before mentioned, a smokeless fire) and that they sprang from an egg. The female Ghul, it is added, appears to men in the deserts, in various forms, converses

with them, and sometimes prostitutes herself to them. Furthermore, the Si'lat, or Si'la, is another demoniacal creature, described by most authors as of the Jinn. It is said that it is mostly found in forests and that when it captures a man, it makes him dance and plays with him as the cat plays with the mouse. A man of Isfahan asserted that many beings of this kind abounded in his country, that sometime the wolf would hunt one of them by night, and devour it, and that, when it had seized it, the Si'la would cry out, "Come to my help, for the wolf devoureth me" or it would cry, " Who will liberate me? I have a hundred dinars, and he shall receive them!" But the people knowing that it was the cry of the Si'la', no one would liberate it; and so the wolf would eat it. (*Britannica*)

The Ghaddar is another creature of a similar nature, described as being found within the borders of Yaman, and sometimes in Tihamah, and in the upper parts of Egypt. It is said that it entices a man to it, and either tortures him in a manner not to be described, or merely terrifies him, and leaves him.

The Dalhan is also a demoniacal being, inhabiting the islands of the seas, having the form of a man, and riding on an ostrich. It eats the flesh of men whom the sea casts on the shore from wrecks. Some say that a Dalhan once attacked a ship on the sea, and desired to take the crew but they contended with it whereupon it uttered a cry which caused them to fall on their faces, and it took them.

The Shiqq is another demoniacal creature, having the form of half a human being (like a man divided longitudinally); and it is believed that the Nasnas is the offspring of a Shiqq and of a human being. The Shiqq appears to travellers; and it was

a demon of this kind who killed, and was killed by Al-qamah, the son of Safwan, the son of Umaiyah, of whom it is well known that he was killed by a Jinn.

The Nasnas is described as resembling half a human being; having half a head, half a body, one arm, and one leg, with which it hops with much agility; as being found in the woods of Yaman. Also, there is the Hatif which is a being that is heard, but not seen; and is often mentioned by Arab writers. It is generally the communicator of some intelligence in the way of advice, or direction, or warning.

Shakespeare and the Ghost in *Hamlet*

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is particularly relevant to the study of the supernatural in general and of Qasim in particular for a few basic reasons. One, the ghost of Hamlet's father is a pivotal literary figure. This is one of the most important and recognizable uses of the ghost within a canonical text. Two, the narrative of the ghost itself is pertinent, because the ghost serves as a gateway to themes of internal corruption, revenge, and madness. As such themes are echoed in other supernatural stories, including Qasim's. Three, Hamlet's state of living on the fine line between what may be a feigned madness or actual madness parallels Qasim's own literary design. Qasim himself uses the guise of the supernatural to explore, uncover, and challenge the corruption and problems within contemporary Arabic culture.

Renaissance England was a time of great contrast. There were huge strides in both literature and science, while there was also much violence and uncertainty. It was the time of an ironic paradox: for example, the Queen was the royal head of England and head of the Anglican church, but in English homes, women were not the heads of their families. Women were essentially the property of their husbands. Religious beliefs were largely absolute; that is, while people violently disagreed about *how* one should worship God, few ever wondered *whether* God actually existed. Nonetheless, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we see at least the beginnings of modern doubt, as well as the beginnings of modern psychology. Throughout Shakespeare, from the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to *Macbeth's* witches and ghosts to *King Lear*'s pagan underpinnings, there is a glance backwards towards a pre-Christian world, as well as an urge forwards towards modern man's uncertainty about God.

If one can argue that Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato, one could also argue that much of modern Western literature is a footnote to Shakespeare. The ghost of Hamlet's father has been examined in, perhaps, torturous detail by whole generations of literary and dramatic scholars. While it is beyond the scope of this study to evaluate such criticism in detail, it is relevant to point out that much of this discussion has revolved around the following: whether the ghost is "real," whether Hamlet is correct in following the ghost's instructions, and whether Hamlet's famous inaction/delay in revenging his father's death stems from Hamlet's own doubt as to whether the ghost is or is not "real."

The Renaissance, the "rebirth" of classical knowledge and enlightenment, also embodied the seeds of modern doubt, a doubt that largely stems from the development of the empirical sciences. (This reaches fruition during the twentieth century, when the empirical sciences promise answers through scientific method and proof. However, at the same time, Freud and others point to aspects of the unknown in the human condition, such as the subconscious). In this sense then, *Hamlet* foreshadows the cultural doubt of later centuries, hence this is a possible reason for the play's sustained popularity in our times. The subconscious represents an aspect of the world that is both powerful/ever-present, and yet mysterious and invisible. It thus shares many features in common with the supernatural forces that mankind has more or less believed in since the beginning of civilization. The ghost of Hamlet's father is a fulcrum around which the forces of the past (the supernatural) and the forces of the future (the subconscious) as well as the forces of the present (political instability)

revolve and crystallize. The ghost also seems to be a part of the very physical environment of the play: thus it appears on dark and lonely ramparts on storm-ridden nights in the bleak and inhospitable land of Denmark. It *embodies* these features and yet is also a *part* of them.

The significance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the importance of the ghost in *Hamlet*, and the ghost's influence upon the play's themes. For example, even though the ghost of old Hamlet is present in only a few scenes, he is nevertheless a dominant presence throughout the play, and, not only is the ghost dominant, he is also directly linked to many of the play's themes. Moreover, his importance may be traced in his spirit nature, his influence upon the play's structure, and his effect upon Hamlet and therefore indirectly upon all the major characters in the play. Second, there is the ghost's status as a spirit. For instance, the ghost is an apparition of questionable status, and, the status and existence of ghosts therefore reflects uncertainties during the Elizabethan period. Furthermore, the ghost of King Hamlet passes parts of these tests, but fails others. Third, the ghost's character is real and well drawn as an individual person by Shakespeare. Without a doubt, the ghost has many qualities of a living human being as opposed to those of either a bad or a good spirit. In addition, the ghost also shows other human traits. Fourth, one has to point out the ghost's importance in the structure of the play. For instance, Shakespeare's great strength as a dramatist is shown not only in his giving the ghost such a round, full character, but also in integrating him fully within the play's structure. Furthermore, the ghost is also significant as a part of some of the other major structures of the play. Fifth, the

ghost's effect is beyond the ghost's practical and structural importance in the action. He has profound psychological influence, mainly negative, on the characters. Moreover, these effects occur because, almost literally, Hamlet himself cannot escape, and it is, finally, this power over his son that gives the ghost the greatest influence in the play. [21]

The ghost also is an integral part of Hamlet's own mind, indeed in many modern productions the director conceptualizes that the ghost is literally created by Hamlet's subconscious. The other soldiers see it because they are subject to the kind of mass-hallucination that has been proven to occasionally occur at times within group dynamics. For instance, the creation of a ghost in one's subconscious is manifested in *Gilgamesh*. We, as readers of *Gilgamesh*, do not know if the ghost is really seen by the hero, or is just a matter of hallucination or dreams. This leads us to think about two dynamic explanations; the first one is an internal psychological ghost, and the second one is a true external seeing of the ghost. At any rate, this interpretation avoids the supernatural origin of the ghost, but merely exchanges it for something equally unknown and perhaps frightening: the recesses of the mind that greatly influence all of us but over which we have little control or even knowledge.

In *Hamlet* the ghost is a vessel into which meaning may be poured according to our wishes. To the soldiers it represents the political instability and the uncertainty of their own positions within it. To Horatio it reflects his own foreboding about the exchange of power and the death of the King; it also reflects his alienation from his previously close friend, Prince Hamlet. To Hamlet it represents many things. It

represents all that we have mentioned above, but also perhaps the uncertainty of a young man on the brink of the genuine responsibilities of manhood. "Remember me" the ghost intones at various times in the play. It stands within the action and yet outside of it too. Gone is the easy communication with the supernatural that occurred in earlier civilizations; now there is a gulf separating the mortal from the ghost, one full of as much darkness and foreboding as surrounds the castle on which the ghost appears.

The ghost also causes Hamlet to put "an antic disposition on," and from that point in the play we do not know whether Hamlet is genuinely insane or merely acting when he appears to be behaving in an irrational manner. This is logical as the ghost represents a part of Hamlet's subconscious, an unknown region over which he has no control. The ghost also embodies another new development, and one that is vital for our discussion of a specific type of ghost story. Unlike the ghosts of previous cultures, who walked freely among men, because that was their correct place in the order of things. Hamlet's father's ghost is condemned to walk the ramparts so long as he is not avenged. For instance, the ghost as Shakespeare envisioned it, and as his vision has indelibly influenced other ghosts, is forced to stay among the world of living beings because of some unnatural and violent act.

This ghost reflects a change in the beliefs surrounding the afterlife - from an active, natural interaction with the living to a complete removal from them. Within the Renaissance vision, Heaven and Hell were remote from mortal man, not present around him. The ghost belongs in either Heaven or Hell, not here on earth. He is tied

to the earth through violence, and can only escape these chains when he has been avenged. The ghost often represents something unnatural and frightening, features that exist in literary interpretations throughout the past and until this day.

In his famous soliloquy "To be, or not to be . . ." Hamlet expresses what is a remarkable degree of uncertainty (at least for his age) about what occurs after death. The "dreams" that "may come" give him "pause." There is none of the certainty of either an eternity in Heaven or Hell, as promised by Christian doctrine, but merely a fear that death is utterly uncertain, full of nightmarish, unending dreams: full of a permanent subconscious in other words. The age of certainty, of a link between the world of the dead and the living in the form of the ghost, is gone. Now all is mystery and terror.

Each critic in the field of the supernatural and ghost story has a different view of Hamlet's ghost and its appearance to characters in the play. Helen Stewart states in her critical study, *The Supernatural in Shakespeare*, "The foundation of the play of *Hamlet* is taken from *Saxo Grammaticus*, and from the *Histoires Tragiques of Belleforest*, but the ghost is the author's own invention, and bears every mark of being the creation of a youthful genius."[22] She elaborates further, "This well-known apparition occupies a unique position among the supernatural visitants of the plays, in that it defies all attempts at scientific explanation. There is neither sleep, nor disordered imagination to account for its appearance to Marcellus and Bernardo and Horatio; and when the Queen, on the occasion of its second appearance to Hamlet, exclaims:

This is the very coinage of your brain,
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in,

Hamlet repudiates it at once:

"Ecstasy!
My pulse as yours does temperately keep time,
And makes as healthful music. It's not madness
That I have uttered; bring me to the test
And I the matter will re-word, which madness
Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace,
Lay not a flattering unction to your soul
That not your trespass, but my madness speaks,
I will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
Whiles rank corruption mining all within,
Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven,
Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,
And do not spread the compost on the weeds
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue,
For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
Yea curb and woo for leave to do him good.
(Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, Act 3, Scene 4)

And the reader is made to feel with him that such sophistry cannot explain the case."(Stewart, 34)

Stewart continued, "The ghost has the power of making himself visible to whom he will, and perseveres in his visits to the watchers on the lonely ramparts till he has attained his purpose of speaking to young Hamlet." (Stewart, 34)

Another critic of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is L. W. Rogers, the author of *The Ghost in Shakespeare: A Study of the Occultism in the Shakespeare Plays*. He explains the appearance of the ghost in Hamlet as "in the attempt to make it appear that the ghost of Hamlet's father is merely intended to be an "objectification of the mental condition of Hamlet." It is argued that what he sees, or thinks he sees, is

identical with his state of mind at the moment; that Hamlet suspects his uncle of the murder and that when the ghost says,

> The serpent that did sting thy father's life now wears his crown,
> Hamlet exclaims,
> O my prophetic soul! My uncle!

And then the ghost goes on to fuller confirmation, all of which is in harmony with Hamlet's preconceived opinion. Thus runs the argument."

Later in same chapter titled *Hamlet*, Mr. Rogers, argued that "The ghost in *Hamlet* is very clearly meant to be a literal return of the dead king, and, it is quite impossible to dispose of it by any theory of hallucination or by an assumption that it is a mere dramatic portrayal of the state of mind of any of the characters who see it."[23]

Another critic of the supernatural is C. E. Whitmore who wrote *The Supernatural in Tragedy.*[24] He argues that the supernatural is most frequently associated with tragedy, and is found where tragedy is at its best. But one can say that this claim is not quite accurate. The supernatural exists in melodrama, and even in comedy.

Supernatural in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth century

As we move beyond Shakespeare, towards the modern day, we find ghosts existing in many different forms. The famous Dickens's ghosts in *A Christmas Carol* belong to the subconscious genre. They reveal truths about the world that Scrooge already knows, but which he has been desperately avoiding in his mean and selfish behavior. The ghosts are ghosts of a previous, present and future existence or way of life rather than ghosts of the dead. They are all contained within Scrooge's experience.[25] Its relationship to the much more frightening Hamlet's ghost is thus assured. The ghost in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* is more interesting because he introduced a new idea: that a ghost is not necessarily always stuck in the past, a reminder of a violent incident. It may also be a prophet of the future.

Thus, the modern supernatural/ghost/horror story has considerably developed and promptly flourished especially in the Western literary canon. Besides, one has to mention the works of many writers of the nineteenth century, such as M. R. James (1862-1936) who enhanced the genre. He is a distinguished British scholar and writer of ghost stories. His first collection, *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, is generally taken to mark the beginning of the modern era of supernatural fiction. Most of M. R. James's stories are concerned with "evil that dieth not but lieth in wait," with the fine use of the exotica of antiquarianism. Yet, there are some critics who still believe that the modern supernatural fiction is a difficult subject to deal with. One of the leading critics in the supernatural field is Dorothy Scarborough who wrote *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*. She states in the preface to her book that the subject of the

supernatural in modern English fiction has been found difficult to deal with because of its wealth of material.

> While there has been no previous book on the topic, and none related to it, save Mr. C. E. Whitmore's work on *The Supernatural in Tragedy*, the mass of fiction itself introducing ghostly or psychic motifs is simply enormous.[26]

Despite her statement of the difficulty of the subject, Scarborough explains our need to read supernatural fiction. In the introduction to her book, she explains that the continuing presence of the weird in literature shows the popular demand for it and must have some basis in human psychology, "The night side of the soul attracts us all. The spirit feeds on mystery. It lives not by fact alone but by the unknowable, and there is no highest mystery without the supernatural." She asserts that Man loves the frozen touch of fear and realizes pure terror only when touched by the unmortal. She further elaborates that the hint of spectral sounds or presences quickens the imagination as no other suggestion can do, and no human shapes of fear can fright the soul as those from beyond the grave. She concluded that "Man's varying moods create heaven, hell, and fairy wonder–lands for him, and people them with strange beings." (Scarborough, 2)

One can notice, through Scarborough's words, that she is referring to the most remarkable supernatural/fantastic works in the past two hundred years. For example, she refers to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass, Vampire, Dracula*, Poe's "Black Cat", and many other supernatural fictions. Clarifying Scarborough, there are two types of supernatural literature: one,

the marvelous or fairy tale-like fantasies; two, the eerie supernatural, such as ghost stories (to which Qasim's stories belong). In general, Scarborough explains that a reader loves the supernatural elements in literature perhaps because they dignify him by giving his existence a feeling of infinity otherwise denied. They grant him a sense of being the center of powers more than earthly, of conflicts supernatural. (Scarborough, 3) Thus, both the marvelous and the eerie types of stories appeal to the reader's imaginative powers, allowing the reader to escape everyday reality and enter into the story world of magic or terror. A relative example of a reader escaping everyday reality would be found in both Qasim's "The City of Winds" and the fantastic works of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*:

> "Oh Tiger-lily!" said Alice, addressing herself to one that was waving gracefully about in the winds, "I wish you could talk!"
> "We can talk," said the Tiger-lily, "when there's any-body worth talking to." Alice was so **astonished** that she couldn't speak for a **minute**: it quite seemed to take her breath away. (Lewis Carroll) [27]

Qasim's Works

With the appearance of a collection of short stories in 1978 by a Kuwait writer, Qasim Khadir Qasim, one can say that the supernatural/ghost/horror story has formed its place in the modern Arabic literary tradition. Qasim's book *The City of Winds and other Stories of the Ghosts and Spirits.* (*Madinatt Al-Reyaah wa Qissas Okh'ra ann Al-Ar'waah wa' Al- Ash'baah*), contains eight short stories: "The City of Winds"; "The Golden Necklace"; "The Maid and the Insane"; "The Weird Guest"; "The Lizard"; "The Painting of Wishes"; "Death in One Lump"; and "The Deserted Hut".[28]

Qasim Khadir Qasim was born 1944 and grew up in Old Kuwait City in Kuwait. After graduating from high school, Qasim went to study in the United Kingdom in the late 1960s. During his stay in London, he was exposed to the writings of E. A. Poe and H. P. Lovecraft. He returned to Kuwait in the early 1970s and in 1978 published a collection of short stories, *The City of Winds and Other Stories of Ghosts and Spirits*. In the 1980s, he worked for the government, as part of the Kuwaiti Fund for Developing countries. In the 1990s, he joined the Kuwaiti Writers' Association and continues to be an active member. Over the past twenty years, he has written several newspaper articles on a variety of topics, including literary experimentation with prose fiction. In essence, this thesis will focus on his 1978 text, *The City of Winds and Other Stories of Ghosts and Spirits*.

Mustapha Bin Nakhi, a Kuwaiti writer and critic, views Qasim as one of the first modern pioneers in this particular kind of supernatural/ghost/horror literature.[29] Rashied Al-Hamad, another Kuwaiti critic and historian, points out that Qasim's writings educate the young generation about the cultural and spiritual life of Kuwait,

especially in the first half of the twentieth century. Also, Al-Hamad indicates that Qasim's passion for the mystery of sea life was clearly a successful factor in achieving complexity in his stories. He added that Qasim masterfully uses elements, such as sand, painting, necklace, and old neglected hut, and then utilizes them to paint his stories with "the color of the supernatural".[30] Another Arabic literary magazine from Egypt categorizes Qasim in its survey of writers from the Arabian Gulf region as an important reference in the literature of horror and magic. In the monthly "Letters" article in the Adaab section of Publications of Literature, the magazine relates Qasim to other Gulf region writers.[31] It states that Qasim differs from other Gulf writers, because of his focus on the supernatural.

In addition, Qasim has many interviews, talks, and lectures about supernatural literature in Kuwait and throughout the Arab world. Moreover, the Kuwaiti National Council for Culture, Arts, and Literature has honored Qasim K. Qasim for his contribution to national literature.[32] Qasim is well recognized throughout the Arab world and particularly within the Arabian Gulf region. He participated in many conferences and literary festivals in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Bahrain. As is apparent, Qasim is an established and recognized Kuwaiti writer, being the subject of critical literary discussions throughout the Arab world.

The works of Qasim illustrate the fact that the modern Arabic supernatural story is a literary genre in its own right. Moreover, they can be viewed as an Arabic contribution to world literature in the field of the supernatural/ghost story. This assertion may be justified both by an individual examination of the stories in isolation

and through a comparison with the wider genre of Western ghost stories. Little analysis of the Arabic supernatural/ghost story has actually been undertaken and so it is only by comparison with the Western type that a structuralist kind of approach can be gleaned. These Western stories have perhaps been overevaluated and overstudied, whereas the Arabic counterparts have, at least until this point, been largely ignored.

Nevertheless, there are some Arab writers-critics who in their books touch upon this subject, whether it is the supernatural, superstition, evil spirits, or ghosts. These writers-critics include: Hasan El-Shamey, in his book *Folktales of Egypt*,[33] Muhammad Badawi, Issa Boullata, through his introduction to Ghada El Saman's collection of short stories *The Square Moon*, Rashad Salim, in his story *Fables, Cities, Princes and Jinn: From Arab Myths and Legends*, Sabri Hafiz, Husain Haddawy (through his introduction to *The Arabian Nights*), Ragai Maker, Mahmoud Manzalaoui, and Abdel-Aziz Abdal Meguid. In addition, there are books by Arabists who also touch upon this subject, such as Roger Allen, Jan Beyerl, J. Brugman, H. A. R. Gibb, Hilary Kipatrick, Matti Moosa, R. A. Nicholson, Wen-chin Ouyang, and Epiphanius Wilson.

On the other hand, there are many critical books about the subject of supernatural in general by Western critics, which I found very useful to my study. These books include the following: Jeffery Alexander, T. E. Apter, Lucie Armitt, Brain Attebery, Bruno Bettelheim, Frank Baker, Marjorie Balzer, Everett Bleiler, Harold Bloom, Lin Carter, Michael Colling, Don Elgin, Michael Hadley, Terry Heller,

Norman Holland, Steven Jones, Sydent Lea, Patrick Parrinder, Jenny Turner, Marsha Tymn, and Jennifer Waelti-Walters.

Lovecraft, Poe, Qasim and the Supernatural

In his collection of short stories, Qasim shows some similarities to the Western type of the supernatural/ghost and horror stories. Throughout the thesis, for example, I explain how Qasim's narrative structure, theme, suspense, thrill, unity, climax, language, motif, and the sequence of events are similar to Western writers. Hence, although the setting of Qasim's story are Arabic and although he utilizes Arabic characters and Arabic themes (for example, survival the desert), he generally follows western short story style.

Qasim derives important narrative techniques from both Arabic-Islamic traditions such as *The Arabian Nights* and The Holy Quran, and from western works. From reading and observing his short stories, one can say that Qasim mixes western techniques with Arabic locale and cultural environment. For example, Qasim sets the location of the supernatural story in mysterious remote places in order for the reader to feel a sense of the exotic or mysterious excitement. Qasim follows western short story writing style, having limited characters, a single plotline, and a unity of time, place, and event. British and North American writers of the supernatural genre focus substantially on setting and on invoking fear and suspense. Usually, but not always, the western settings are remote and mysterious. For example, Qasim's "The City of Winds" is set in the Arabian desert. In "The City of Wind", the narrator mentions areas by their local names, and we have in the story average Arabic characters, yet "The City of Winds" still contains some techniques which are borrowed from the West. For instance, the setting of a mysterious city in remote area can be found in numerous works in world literature, such as Lovecrat's story which deals with a lost

city in the Arabian desert. Moreover, the mysterious city is also a recognized motif in world folklore. This is exactly what Todorov refers to as the important conventions which achieve a certain degree of reality in a literary work. Thus, Qasim employs western short story techniques to tell stories with Arabic settings, characters, and themes.

Furthermore, the significance of Qasim's short stories rests on his utilization of internationally familiar folkloric motifs such as. "Wind personified" which can be found and used (but not limited to) in Jewish culture and myth. (Dov Neuman, *Motif-Index to the Talmudic-Midrashic* Literature), "Picture comes to life" which can be found used in Indian, American and Arabic myths. (Victor Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ourrages arabes ou relatifs aux Arabs*. Arabic literature), "Ghost returns from the dead to reveal murder, or to demand a proper burial" which is used in English and North America myth and culture (Ernest Baughman, *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*). Therefore, Qasim's particular and special employ of such internationally recognized folkloric motifs, one can argue, establishes his originality as a writer of supernatural literature. Moreover, one can find similar Arabic motifs, which are used by Qasim, in Hasan El-Shamy's two volume index, *Folk Traditions of the Arab World: A Guide to Motif Classification*.

Moreover, Qasim, specifically, utilizes old supernatural motifs from the Arabic and Islamic traditions. For example, in the tale "The Physician and the Young Innkeeper" of *The Arabian Nights* (see Chauvin VII. 100-102 and Burton XIX, 195-197) a magician makes two lions, painted on a curtain, come to life and then

transforms them into cats. This motif is only tangentially linked to the topic of a picture which comes to life; more direct typological links exist with certain Westerns examples, particularly with some stories by M. H. James. [34]

Qasim himself reveals that Lovecraft and Poe had influenced him. Since I had an interview with Qasim six years ago, I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to document his experimentation with writing in the supernatural genre. I would also like to include his views on the world of the supernatural, such as the Gothic stories and Western writers. During my interview with him, Qasim mentioned to me that the writings of E. A. Poe and H. P. Lovecraft have greatly influenced him. I found that, for instance, "The City of Winds" has a similar setting, theme, and motif to the one in a story written by Lovecraft, "The Nameless City" (1920). In "The Nameless City," a ruined city in the Arabian desert is inhabited by invisible monstrosities. Moreover, Qasim mentioned to me during the interview that he is working on a collection of short stories that have different motifs from his earlier works such as *The City of Winds and other Stories of the Ghosts and Spirits*, they also contain themes of a supernatural nature. Hence, Qasim himself says that he was influenced by Lovecraft and this can be proven by the parallel between Qasim's "The City of Winds" and Lovecraft's "The Nameless City."

Another example of the influence by Western writers on Qasim can be found in the ghost story of the British author Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924) "Mustapha". Mustapha, a young Egyptian who is the main character in the story, after lapsing from the faith of his father returns to Islam, vowing to kill himself if he relapses. A crude

Englishman lures Mustapha into sinning. Then, Mustapha commits suicide and his ghost haunts the Englishman to death. Qasim uses a similar motif through the painting to haunt the fisherman to death in his story "The Painting of Wishes".

Nevertheless, in the introduction to his book, Qasim K. Qasim reflected on one of his stories,

> In regards to categorizing, I see that "The City of Winds", an imaginative story, which I discovered from deep inside my imagination, came to crown all other stories in the collection. Therefore, I granted it a superior honor by displaying its title luminously, on the top of the book cover. (Qasim, 5)

Lovecreaft, who influenced Qasim, had written many stories that contain themes of supernatural and horror, for example, "The Rats in the Walls", "In the Vault", "The Whisperer in Darkness", "Pickman's Model", "The Music of Erich Zann", "The Outsider", and "The Colour Out of Space".

> The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. H. P. Lovecraft

This the opening sentence of *Supernatural Horror in Literature* by Lovecraft.[35] His book contains several theoretical essays on horror literature. Robert Bloch, who wrote the introduction to an anthology of Lovecraft's stories, *The Best of H.P. Lovecraft: Blood Curdling Tales of Horror and the Macabre*, assessed Lovecraft's book, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, as, "one of the finest essays on horror fiction ever written. Its author, H. P. Lovecraft, is considered by many to be one of the finest writers of such fiction."[36]

Lovecraft is a writer who acts as a bridge between the type of supernatural story that Poe and James wrote and that of a thoroughly modern writer such as Qasim,

and it is his stories that we shall consider here for a moment. Lovecraft's works tend to be subtle, complex and relentless in their drive towards a shock climax that usually appears in the final, italicized last line. The horror is usually achieved by the intrusion of something horrifying, excessive and unconventional into a comfortable, realistic setting. His effect on the genre of horror fiction has been profound. Nevertheless, there are also well found criticisms of the quality of his work, especially his over use of overwrought adjectives such as "eldrich", "uncanny" and "hellish".

Lovecraft made two overall contributions to the supernatural genre in particular and modern fiction in general. His original approach to dark fantasy revived the genre and has influenced every important new writer in the field, such as Stephen King and Qasim K. Qasim and many others. Lovecraft's vision animates his fictions and makes them transcend the limits of the genre to provide a provocative view of the complexity of human nature. For example, "The Outsider" (1926) is an experience told from the point of view of the Outsider, a revenant who arises from a grim, dark land to the surface world, and there learns that he is a monstrous, decomposed corpse. The story evokes emotional responses that are not fully explained by rational, critical interpretation.

To truly appreciate Lovecraft, one must pay attention to his well-known story "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928) and its mythos. A story about the ancient monster-god Cthulhu, who lies buried beneath the city of R'lyeh, is brought to the surface by volcanic disturbance and emerges from his crypt. His emergence had been known in advance in terms of cosmic cycles. "The Call of Cthulhu" is considered to be one of

the most influential stories in modern supernatural fiction. Moreover, Lovecraft believed that in order to keep up with contemporary views of man and his place in the universe one had to breathe life into the old genre. In "The Call of Cthulhu" the mythos of that "terrifying reality" consists of an order of beings that are powerful, and immortal. Lovecraft incorporates real events, places and characters into his stories to give them a strong feeling of authenticity.

Like Qasim, Lovecraft combines magic and horror. For instance, one can compare Lovecraft's "On the Mountains of Madness" to Qasim's "The City of Winds" which combines magic and horror. For instance, "The City of Winds" is a magical city in the desert, controlled by the magical King of Winds. The horror stems from the premise that the Winds take human beings from the city and then eat them. Every month, the Winds take people into the sand, sucking off their flesh in a supernatural and horrible fashion. "The City of Winds" deals with pre-human, pre-religious gods or god-like beings (quite similar to some tales of Lovecraft). Although these beings are not ghosts, they are supernatural beings and illustrate Qasim's general interest in the supernatural.

There are many specific similarities between Qasim and Western writers. For instance, we have the story of Poe's "The Oval Portrait," about a woman in a painting coming to life. Qasim uses almost the same technique to describe the painting in "The Painting of Wishes" as "a rich golden frame." To illustrate this point, consider Poe's description of the painting in "The Oval Portrait":

> Its walls were hung with tapestry and bedecked with manifold and

> multiform armorial trophies, together with an unusually great number of very spirited modern paintings, in frames of rich golden arabesque.[37]

In comparison, Qasim describes the painting in "The Painting of Wishes," in the following manner:

> The painting was extremely beautiful and evocative. The oily color gave it a unique tone. The painting depicted a man sitting in his boat in the middle of the sea. He was holding a fine string which extended to the deep bottom of the sea. The man appeared to be looking at the water with his head down. He looked as if he were staring at one tiny spot in the water, where the water and the string met. His head was covered with a white kaffieh. As I stared at him, I imagined there was a fish deep in the water trying to snap up the bait, while the man was excited about catching it. And I saw that a crystal-clear sky covered the blue, clear sea, and the painting was framed with ornate gold. (Qasim, 127.)

Furthermore, in "The Oval Portrait", Poe's treatment is ultimately the more metaphoric, for lurking behind his arabesque tale is the long, horrid history of the vampire. In "The Oval Portrait," the narrator in the story is credible, like in Qasim's "The Painting of Wishes". In "The Oval Portrait," Poe tries to push the reader towards a metaphoric understanding of art and the vampire motif, while in "The Painting of Wishes", Qasim uses the painting as a prophetic motif.[38] "The Painting of Wishes," like "The City of Winds," is not a ghost story; however it uses the supernatural element (picture comes to life) to express notions of good and evil in an imaginative sort of way. Qasim uses the supernatural as a storytelling device, to entertain the reader by frightening him or her in a "safe" way. It is "safe" in the sense that the reader is entering into a magical world for only the period of reading the story. This

allows the reader to escape into and enjoy the horror of the fiction in an entertaining way.

Qasim also applied Poe's method of subjectivity. The narration techniques that were used by Qasim are similar to those that were used by E. A. Poe and other Western writers. For instance, Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" has two principal characters; the narrator, a man whose madness drives him to murder, and the old man, the victim who is apparently cared for by the madman. This story, narrated by the madman himself, makes clear that he is dangerously disturbed. He did not hate the old man and indeed claims to have loved him. But, he was driven to kill this old man because of his one weird eye. The reader is led into the world of madness that brings the narrator to murder early in the story. The mystery and horror of mental illness are particularly well portrayed in this story. The mystery is maintained to the very end.

Furthermore, Qasim believes that the modern supernatural/ghost/horror story owes its greatness to the Gothic tales from the middle of the eighteenth to the early nineteenth-century. In his conversation with me, he added that many modern Western ghost/horror stories writers were influenced by the Gothic writers. He directed my attention to the borrowing of some devices, such as settings, from the Gothic tales that are used by Western writers even today, such as the use of the graveyard and the last lonely house in a small town.

A relative example of Gothic influence on Qasim would be found in the work of Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*.[39] It is a horror tale, which was published in 1765 and considered to be the first Gothic novel in the English language. Its

supernatural happenings and mysterious ambiance were widely emulated in the genre. According to Joanne G. Kashdan, it is best known for its technique and style. *The Castle of Otranto* came out in the seventh decade of the eighteen-century and it was viewed as a rejection of the rational, mimetic beliefs of Neo-Classicism. Moreover, it was seen as a revival of interest in the obscure past, which is embodied in medieval life. It attempts to portray human conduct and sentiment with psychological realism while setting the action in remote and mysterious places and times (the castle itself as a setting of the novel). The emotional thrills of adventure provide the reader with escape from daily routine life. The same motif we find in reading "The City of Winds", Qasim takes his readers to a magical city in the Arabian desert, a ride which generates first suspense and later a horrifying result.

Two decades later, William Beckford published his novel *Vathek* (1786), which is a romantic allegory influenced by the tales of *The Arabian Nights*. Beckford makes some serious explorations of evil through his Gothic novel. It can be read as a parable on the theme of recognizing evil. Clearly the Arabian caliph hero is not meant to be realistic, but the embodiment of evil on a grand scale. Vathek reminds us of Faust, his journey is meant to discover experiences; but unlike Faust, Vathek searches only for the depths of evil through his own madness and in exploiting the corruption of others. Beckford's text is quite Orientalist and inimical to Islam. That is, *Vathek* is set in Arabia and the characters are Islamic. The title character Vathek is an Arabian caliph with a fondness for women. Vathek impiously defies Mohammed in the seventh heaven, thus condemning himself to eternal damnation and expulsion to hell.

The concept of "recognizing evil" can be found in "The Painting of Wishes" and also in "The Deserted Hut". Yet one must say that *Vathek* has a moral ending, the three stories of Qasim end like typical stories of Poe and Lovecraft the evil seems to escape punishment and becomes unchallengeable. In the three works of Qasim, we do not recognize any moral or happy ending. All three central characters are either killed or become "lunatic"[40]. Qasim's stories illustrate a belief in fate. That is, the protagonist cannot escape or defeat evil forces. In other words, there are mysterious forces more powerful than humans. And these forces do not discriminate who they attack or destroy; a good man is not guaranteed a happy ending in Qasim's stories. Qasim is saying that life is not predictable and that chance can affect anyone, good or bad, in a positive and especially negative manner. Fate is mysterious and humans do not understand how such supernatural forces operate. In Qasim's stories, humans are simply the tragic victims of such mysterious forces.

Qasim's stories fit neatly into the ghost and supernatural genre through the various features that they exhibit. On the most basic level, "reality" is perceived as more than the here and now, the concrete type of reality that we all assume that we live in; forces outside of this type of reality and perhaps even constantly make their presence known. Eventually they come to dominate the story. These are the classic features of any ghost or supernatural story.

Secondly, the stories have a clear structure in which various characters are placed at contrasting "distances" from the supernatural circumstances of the story. Thus we have an apparently credible narrator, who acts as the link between the reader

and the world of the story. He is often remote from the actual supernatural phenomenon, close to the world of the reader and thus able to introduce him/her to the bizarre world that Qasim unfolds. Closest to the actual phenomenon is another man who tells the story to the narrator: he is often a close friend of the real protagonist, the man who comes in close contact with the supernatural phenomenon and often is greatly affected by it. For example, in "The Deserted Hut" he becomes possessed by the ghost, while in "The Painting of Wishes" and "The City of Winds" he is killed by the supernatural. Through this method of having various characters at different levels of proximity to the supernatural, Qasim enables the reader to empathize with the protagonist who would be too remote from the secular world if the story were just told in the third-person omniscient narrator mode. The remoteness would cause distance and thus an ability to avoid the true horror of the story. This is a distance that Qasim wants to avoid, for his literary power depends on proximity. In addition, the first-person narrative approach stresses the possible subjective and psychological perspective of the speaker. "The City of Winds" begins with a letter that is a plea to the police for help from the winds. Then, a friend of Abdullah (the story's main subject) says Abdullah handed him this letter. What follows is the story within the letter. So, the supernatural elements and Abdullah's account are filtered through a narrative voice that is not Abdullah's. Rather, the narrative voice is either Abdullah's friend or the letter itself. Hence, due to the lack of a reliable objective voice, a potential for ambiguity is introduced into the story.

One further feature of Qasim's stories which makes them part of a specific genre is the method of foreshadowing. The stories often start on a mundane and almost tame plane with strange occurrences that are not particularly harrowing or even frightening. But these events merely foreshadow the horrible events to come. In their very ordinariness and normality they act as a contrast to the later happenings and cast shadows towards the future. This element of initial minimization that acts as a touch of foreboding is a feature of many literary genres, but particularly those with a supernatural subject-matter. This foreshadowing creates a sense of suspense in the reader.

Some of Qasim's storytelling idiosyncrasies make his stories especially Arabian in nature. The supernatural spirits in "The City of Winds" are associated with sand storms, and in all his stories the desert, so prevalent and overpowering in Arabic stories, is personified into an almost malevolent kind of presence. The desert environment is not only desolate and dead, it seeks to make those who are living desolate and dead. It is active rather than passive. The frightening physical environments of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic stories are similar to this, but the concentration on the *heat* and the *dryness* and the *wind* in Qasim's stories make them especially Arabic in nature.

We might compare this specifically frightening Arabic nature with the particularly American nature of some of Poe's stories, such as "The Tell-Tale Heart". In this story the only characters are the narrator and the old man whom he murders. The narrator hears the heartbeat of the old man he murders, but the sound of the

heartbeat only exists within the narrator's mind. In comparison, in Qasim's "The Maid and the Insane," a maid kills the son of the family she works for. Like the narrator killing the annoying old man in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the maid kills the young son of the family she works for, because he is mentally-handicapped and is too much of a burden on her and the town in which she lives. The mentally-handicapped boy demands too much of her time, so she does not have time for her own daughter. Tragically, she kills the boy by burning him in the kitchen.

Qasim protects himself from controversy, because the only son in the family is not a normal boy. So, his death would not be as much of a loss as if he were normal. This addresses the Arabic bias for male offspring.

Qasim uses the fire as a motif to comment upon the less fortunate in Arabia. At the same time he also comments on racism and conservative traditionalism. Because the maid is a foreign help and lower class, her attack on the boy is a safe way to give a voice to the weak within Arabia, women, the lower class, and foreigners. In a sense, this is a violent revolt of the weak over the more powerful. The mentally-handicapped boy symbolizes the mental slowness of the patriarchal Arabic culture. This is not a literal story; it is not objective. If it were, the maid would be punished without question. The story is a way to comment on patriarchy in Arabia. The mental slowness of the boy symbolizes the slowness of the powerful Arabic males who pride themselves on their economic, mental, and gender superiority. Qasim is saying that superiority, whether it is class-based, ethnically-based, or gender-based, is an artificial construct used by the elite to dominate the weak. This is the meaning of using the

weak as a help around the house, such as in the case of the maid. So, "The Maid and the Insane" is a murder story that reflects the "butler did it" cliché in American tales, but with a serious commentary on Arabic patriarchy.

In another story by Qasim, "The Weird Guest," a visitor from America returns to Kuwait and meets with an old friend over a cup of coffee. This friend is the narrator. The two converse with one another and then, at night, the visitor disappears while they are talking. The narrator closes his eyes for a moment and when he opens his eyes, the visitor has disappeared. The next day, in the newspaper's obituaries, the narrator discovers that the visitor died five days ago in the United States. The visitor was speeding and died in a car crash. The end of the story reveals that the visitor was a ghost of a dead person. In "The Weird Guest", there is a cultural meaning and backdrop of Islamic belief behind the story. Ancient Arabs believed that absent people are transformed into ghosts if they continue to stay away from their homeland or if circumstances force them to remain overseas. This old myth or belief is still felt by Arabs today. For example, historically, many Kuwaiti families sent their loved ones to trade with India for spices and other goods. More recently, Kuwaiti families send their loved-ones to go to school overseas, often to the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. As a result of the longing or perhaps when the loved-ones decide to stay longer than expected or even permanently reside in these countries, their families refer to them as ghosts. In a negative way, the memory of their old Kuwaiti self is like a ghost. In a positive way, these emigrants are admired by some, as success stories. Qasim's story refers, therefore, both to the common belief that nostalgic dead

persons may appear in their homeland after death and to this notion of the Kuwaiti emigrant as ghost, a person who is no longer Kuwaiti. Thus, Qasim's narratives are a fascinating mixture of the overall genre of the supernatural/ghost/ horror story with specifically Arabic accents and features.

So Qasim may be evidence for the fact that structuralism, while a useful and powerful tool for literary analysis, is not necessarily the only method that is either useful or in fact needed. There are specific cultural aspects of any type of literature, even though, the supernatural/ghost story, may be regarded as part of one overall literary structure/genre. The mixture of the specific and the general, of the author's unique perspective and technique mixed with the resonance of overall narrative structure, is what makes the study of literature so compelling. Any specific type of methodology is always too narrow and limited for a specific work or author. We must adopt a *bricoleur* approach in which we take methodological strategies from different techniques as we need them.

Before moving directly into our method of approach and Qasim's actual stories, it is necessary to widen our focus beyond even the general features of the ghost story and our brief history of them into the questions which the word "ghost" implies. Although we have walked on the moon and may soon travel to the stars, we have yet to learn *what* and *why* we are. Some, although in lessening numbers, toss the problem of man into the lap of religion by judging it to be the whim of an omnipotent creator. But even if we are to accept uncritically the notion of instantaneous creation by a superior force at the beginning of human, and a God as Judge at the end of each

of our existences, these beliefs leave unanswered the question: Who created the Creator?

If we go to the other end of the scale and ascribe our existence to a slow process of natural evolution in which chemicals are mixed in certain ways to create larger structures and that somehow these chemicals became imbued with life, ultimately ending up with a Man developing from a large ape. . . if we take all this to be true, it does not explain the sense of something beyond the here and now which every human being experiences at some time or other, and also the numerous appearances of "ghosts" to apparently ordinary and credible people.

The original supernatural/ghost/horror stories came from tales told around a fire in pre-civilization. They were methods of explaining at least what occurred after death to people who know as little about this as we do today, but also to explain the apparent appearance of dead relatives before their surprised survivors. It is not the purpose of this work to consider the validity or otherwise of ghost-sightings, although it is clear that *some* phenomenon is taking place. Whether it is hallucination, wishful thinking, some kind of photographic imprint of an incident left at a place or the literal appearance of a "spirit" is perhaps irrelevant. What we call "supernatural/ghosts" are phenomena seen and which have been witnessed for millennia in all parts of the world.

The supernatural/ghost story acts as a reflection of and possible explanation for these occurrences. In the best tradition of all literature, it represents a fictional analysis of one of the more perturbing mysteries of life. The supernatural/ghost story is a method of working-through this mystery. In each culture it represents one method

of examining both the specific experience of the "supernatural/ghost", but also attempts to crack the door that has remained steadfastly shut. The door that divides our living years from death may be moved to the side, as we have tried to do in modern secular Western culture, or may be a central element in our lives, as has always been the case in Indian and some other civilizations. The supernatural/ghost story is the physical embodiment of our uncertainties and is a stumbling, if fascinating attempt at answering some of our most profound questions. Ultimately, all of Qasim's stories are fanciful entertainment. The supernatural elements and the horrific elements are used so as to maximize the dramatic conflict, the tension, the irony, and the suspense experienced by the characters. This, in turn, makes for a rich escapist experience for the reader, who can enjoy the imagination and tension of Qasim's supernatural story world in an entertaining manner, while also having glimpses of other realities and gaining social and cultural insights.

Method of Approach

> It is never, so to speak, in full view. Its presence must never compel belief in a mystic interpretation of a vital event; it must rather point, or *hint*, at it. In the really fantastic, the external, formal possibility of a simple explanation of ordinary and commonplace connections among the phenomena always remains. This external explanation, however, finally loses its internal probability. -Vladimir Solovyev.[41]

A couple of ways to approach the subject of the supernatural/ghost story will be through a close reading and through Todorov's structuralism. A close reading is a methodology that asks the reader to pay close attention to a text in order to find the answer to a certain question. The two main questions that inform my close analysis of Qasim are: How does the supernatural elements function and what social commentary is Qasim making?

In spite of the fact that structuralism has two basic types, one concentrates its study on the patterns formed by linguistic elements in a work in order to find which ones inform the text, and, the second type is the more common one, with close attachments to semiotics. I like to begin with the latter one, because it sees literary conventions as a system of codes that contribute to and convey meaning. In other words, it focuses on how meaning is conveyed rather than what meaning is conveyed. Then, I would like to state what meaning is conveyed in relation to Arabic culture; in other words, I will elucidate Qasim's cultural criticism.

Todorov's basic definition of the "fantastic" will be used to elucidate the Arabic texts of Qasim. Todorov's theory of the supernatural in literature is presented in his book *The Fantastic*. Christine Brooke–Rose has made a useful summary of the

three conditions which Todorov believes to be more or less standard components of the "pure" fantastic.

> The reader must hesitate between natural and supernatural explanations of what happens in the WORK up to its conclusion; this hesitation may be represented – that is, it may be shared by a leading CHARACTER in the work (this, according to Todorov, is normal but not essential); and the reader must reject both a poetic and an allegorical reading of the work, as both of these destroy the hesitation which is fundamental to the pure fantastic.[42]

Todorov defines the fantastic as something which occurs when an event is experienced "which cannot be explained by the laws of . . . familiar world" The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions; either he is the victim of an illusion of the sense, of a product of imagination and the laws of the world theory remain what they are; or else, the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this is reality is controlled by the laws of the unknown. The fantastic occupies the duration of this certainty. As a critical departure point, I will apply Todorov's definition to the works of Qasim.

Tzvetan Todorov offers the kind of *bricoleur* approach that suits the methodology of this study. He argues that a literary text can be understood in a number of ways. In his essay "Comment Lire," [43] he addresses the essential points in studying literature. The traditional approaches are *projection*, *commentary* and *poetics*. "Projection" is characterized by the reader reading "through" the literary text, and thus moving beyond it. The second type, the "commentary," requires that we remain within the boundaries of the text, as is the case with a technique such as close

reading. The last approach is "poetics," in which general principles manifest themselves in particular literary works. Todorov insists that the poetics approach to a work should lead to conclusions that "complete" or "modify" the initial assumptions of the study. All of these approaches can be applied to Qasim's work.

Another of Todorov's theories would be applicable to Qasim's stories. He classifies and refines Northrop H. Frye's proposal of several sets of categories or "modes of fiction." These sets of categories are constituted by the relation between the hero of the work and the readers or the "laws of nature." There are five specific modes:

> ***Myth***: The hero is by nature superior to the reader/laws of nature.
> ***Legend/Fairy Tale***: the hero is by degree superior to the reader/laws of nature.
> ***High Mimetic Genre***: the hero is by degree superior to the reader but NOT to the laws of nature.
> ***Low Mimetic Genre***: the hero is on a basis of equality with the reader/laws of nature.
> ***Irony***: the hero is inferior to the reader.[44]

These various categories may be loosely applied to any story, but in particular to such narratives as Qasim's, in which characters fall into specific categories of proximity to the supernatural phenomenon/ghost at the center of the story.

On a more specific level, Todorov is also the most respected authority on the literary theory of the supernatural story. In his book *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* he argues that the *fantastic* requires the fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate in his estimation of whether a natural or supernatural explanation of the events described is appropriate. Second, this

hesitation must also be experienced by at least one character. So the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character and at the same time as the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work. In the case of a naive reading, the reader identifies himself with the actual character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text; he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations. These three requirements do not have an equal value within Todorov's schema; the first and the third constitute the actual genre, while the second may not be fulfilled. Nevertheless, most examples belonging to the literature of the genre satisfy all three conditions. (Todorov, 31)

Todorov, as Robert Scholes states, creates new opportunities for communication between writers and readers. He approaches what may be regarded as one of the humbler literary genres, the Fantastic, with complete and utter seriousness.

> From the time of Aristotle on, poetics has concerned itself with genres as codifications or procedures and responses. Thus a tragedy does this kind of thing to elicit that kind of response. Todorov examines the codes shared by writer and reader that enable a certain kind of communication to take place. A literary text is a linguistic event, but it is an extraordinary one with literary coding superimposed on the language. Following Jakobson, this is what the structuralists such as Todorov say, and this is what Aristotle originally said, although his message was cloaked in a very different type of language.[45]

In *The Fantastic*, Todorov seeks to examine both generic theory and a particular genre, moving back and forth between metapoetics and theorizing, as well as between theory and history, between idea and fact. His work on the fantastic is

about a historical phenomena that we recognize, about specific words that we may read, but it is also about the use and abuse of generic theory. Todorov's book is consciously structuralist in its approach to its generic subject. He seeks linguistic bases for the structural features that he notes in fantastic texts. He strives in his methodology for a rigor and system that approaches the scientific. In this manner he raises the annoying and perhaps unanswerable question of whether literary study should (or even can) aspire to scientific levels of exactness and consensus. Perhaps literary criticism should reflect the very intangibility of the nature of literary texts. It is in the author's choice of word that the imagination of the reader may find itself, it is perhaps here that the author reveals the true uncertainty of life. Science and literary criticism examine different kinds of truth and so the one need not aspire to the standards of the other.

Todorov argues that when we examine works of literature from the perspective of the genre, we discover a principle operative in a number of texts, rather than what is specific about each of them.

To study Balzac's "The Magic Skin" in the context of the fantastic genre is quite different from studying the narrative in and of itself, or in the canon of Balzac's works, or in that of contemporary literature. The fantastic occupies a region of uncertainty. Once we, (the reader, the narrator, the protagonist) choose one answer or another, we leave the genre of the fantastic for a neighboring genre, perhaps that of the "uncanny" or the "marvelous". The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows of the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.

So the concept of the fantastic may only be defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary. (Todorov, 11)

A major point of controversy among more recent commentators, Scholes points out, concerns the extent to which the fantastic constitutes an independent genre, and if so, what actually are the defining characteristics of this genre. (Todorov, 11) Todorov believes that there are more or less standard components of the pure fantastic. The reader must hesitate between the natural and supernatural explanations of what happens in the work up to its conclusion. This hesitation may be represented, or shared, by a leading character. The work and the reader must reject the poetic and allegorical reading of the work, because both of these destroy the hesitation that is fundamental to the pure fantastic. If there is no hesitation then we are either in the realm of the *uncanny* (the events are seen by the reader to have a natural explanation) or of the *marvelous* (the events are seen by the reader to have a supernatural explanation). (Todorov, 11)

In Qasim's work, as in many other authors, it is difficult to identify the exact features of the story within the generalities of a theory. Exact correlation between a theory and a particular work is impossible, because the theory by necessity is a model of fictional reality rather than an exact representation of it. As a novel or short story is a fictional representation of reality rather than a perfect rendition of it, so literary theory is a representation of particular genres of literary work rather than a perfect guide. As a method of identifying those aspects that fit within theory and those aspects that are unique, I will utilize the technique of close-reading. Close-reading

enables an almost microscopic analysis of a text at the closest possible distance, while the structuralist point of view will enable us to see the stories within the context of an overall genre. Besides, I will take into consideration the cultural (Kuwait as a locale), national (the Arab world as an influence on values and traditions), and religious (Islam as a governing belief) distinctiveness, in which Qasim's stories are written.

The main thesis of this work will be that only through the theoretical approach of a model such as offered by structuralism *and* through close reading can one gain a true understanding of a text. Close-reading without the context of an overall genre enables great understanding of a particular author, but one that lacks the perspective to put his/her work within an overall context. The overview of a technique such as offered by a structuralist reading provides this context, but the unique perspectives and features of each individual author are matters of the utmost importance if we are to truly understand the complexity of literary experience which will be lost by pure structuralism. Indeed, the discovery of unique features in a way counters the whole project of structuralist thought, just as the common features of a genre may counter the unique realizations of a close-reading: it is in the friction and tension caused by the interplay of these two conflicting techniques that truth may be found.

So in the work of Qasim we may see that one reader may take one particular stance and another will take a different one, thus placing the stories in a different genre according to the preference of the reader. What type of reaction Qasim intends is not always entirely clear. Highlighting the often limited and somewhat arbitrary nature of the genre-view of literature is the fact that it cannot account for all the actual

variations, often within a specific story, let alone, a writer's overall work or the work of a domain as diverse as the Arabic culture. These methods are handy tools rather than absolutes.

Of course actual literary study requires a certain amount of generalization, otherwise we would not be able to describe a particular genre and illustrate its main characteristics. Knowledge of the general features of a type of literature will increase our understanding and, dare one say, our enjoyment of a particular piece in question. If the theory comes to dominate then the whole study becomes lost in a pseudo-scientific search for some universal truths of literary structure that may never actually be gleaned as the reality of literature is too complex. So while the two techniques of structuralism and close-reading will compete for attention within this analysis, the overarching theme will be the understanding of the text. As stated before, the energy created by the friction and tension between these contrasting techniques will light the way to the truth expressed in Qasim's works.

How then can this fit within a structuralist view of literature? I will initially discuss the main aspects of structuralism as some will apply directly to this and some not. Structuralism claims to add a certain objectivity, indeed, a scientific objectivity to the study of literature that had previously been criticized as too subjective, individualistic and impressionistic. Scientific objectivity is achieved by subordinating the *parole* to the *langue*. Actual usage is abandoned in favor of studying the structure of the system in abstract terms. In pure structuralism the individuality of the text disappears in favor of looking at patterns, systems and structures. The Russian

Formalists, an austere early form of European Structuralism, argue, that *all* narratives can be identified as variations on certain basic universal narrative patterns.[46]

In this methodology the author is canceled out, or at least rendered irrelevant as the text is a function of the system, not of an individual. As Barthes put it in "The Death of the Author," the author is perhaps not dead because he was never alive.[47] The structuralist model argues that the structure of language itself produces "reality": we can only think through language, and therefore its structure determines our perception of reality. Language, in a sense, speaks us, rather than the other way round.

As the techniques rub against each other, so will the mixture of Arab and European perspective within the stories. As we shall see, Qasim, who is well-read and versed within a Western literary tradition, transplants some of these features into the Arabic context. This transplantation, which is more a dynamic equilibrium between often-disparate forms than a smooth combination, offers both advantages and dangerous possibilities for misinterpretation for the critic. The possibility is that the melding of two traditions illustrates truths about both that would be lost in the uniform "sameness" typical within the genre only influenced by one culture.

The mixture that Qasim's work both represents and exemplifies reflects the often contradictory and paradoxical forces at work within the Arab world itself. Steeped in tradition and presently greatly influenced by a fundamentalist religion that is the heart of most life, the Arab world is also the center of a distinctly Western economic and industrial system. Oil has brought the Arab world previously

undreamed-of wealth and importance, but has simultaneously edged competing cultural and social forces into the countries as well.

The Arab world in general, and Kuwait in particular, is a cultural and social battleground on which these forces fight with each other. Qasim utilizes three major themes in his works under scrutiny. First is the concept of a lost city, or culture in the midst of the Arabian desert. Second is a picture that comes to life, is prophetic, and to some extent exhibits magical or at least extraordinary powers. Third is the idea of ghosts re-enacting a fateful moment in their earthly life in an attempt to influence the still-alive in their actions, but also to expiate for their past. In addition, I will keep in mind the importance of structure of the supernatural story as a literary technique to analyze Qasim's three short stories.

Qasim's supernatural stories, including ghost and horror tales, tend to deal with magical forces in a more psychological, tragic, or frightening way. Moreover, Qasim combines many literary techniques to form these different forms. There is conflict of numerous sorts within his stories, but it is that most ancient of enemies, the desert that, is used as a symbol for outside forces of a very modern nature that are challenging Kuwait. That symbol is the desert, as we shall see in the first story to be analyzed in this study: "The City of Winds".

Chapter I

"The City of Winds": A Supernatural Story

> After a short while I looked at him and asked him:
> -"The city of winds! What do you mean...Is there a city [for] the winds?"
> The old man [the broker of the king of winds] replied with an excited tone:
>
> -"Yes, indeed, the winds have a city... What a great city... I, personally, have seen it and seen its citizens, the youngsters and elders, I also saw its women and their children." (Qasim, 29)

1- Introduction and a Note on Translation

It is perhaps useful to consider the state of Kuwait at that particular time, the 1970s. As a newly independent country, especially in regards to the nationalization of its oil companies, Kuwait was beginning to enjoy a period of great prosperity under a comparatively liberal and benign leadership. The oil crisis of 1973 was over. But underneath this apparent scene of blissful happiness lay more disturbing, and perhaps disturbed characteristics. Kuwait was created when colonial powers carved up the Middle East in the vain hope of creating a stable region friendly to the West. Because of their oil reserves, the Arabian Gulf countries gained vast amounts of wealth, but had yet to develop the social, cultural and political systems which could deal with this wealth. The Arabs had always been close to the land, living a largely nomadic lifestyle for centuries. The land was seen as a partner for all this time.

But with the advent of oil and a whole series of connected industries, the land became something of an ambivalent friend, or perhaps even an enemy. Now the land was plundered, drained, both literally and, as Qasim suggests, metaphorically of its riches and delights by humans. The Kuwaiti people had become closer to the land

because they relied upon it so much, but also divorced from it as the divides which modern man puts between himself and nature became apparent in this suddenly rich country.

"The City of Winds" examines, among other things, the sense of detachment and alienation from the land which has occurred with this new relationship. The major image in the story is of course the "wind" or "cyclone," but for "wind" or "cyclone" we may take the whole of nature. Moreover, if one considers that Qasim is using the image of a cyclone, then this is not just an everyday wind, but a powerful force of nature capable of great destruction. Hence, Qasim's "wind" is a cyclone, which is a personification of nature's power and anger. The image which I will examine later in detail, that of the man mostly buried in the sand, but with his head sticking above the surface, suggests that the whole story revolves around humanity's relationship with nature, both that of the earth, and that which we find in the atmosphere. In addition, the wind is a motif well-known in folklore, such as "establishment of present order: winds, God of wind in shape of kite, cave of winds originally confined in caves, and many other similar motifs.(See endnote 33) Qasim uses a bicultural approach to examine this complex relationship. He uses apparent models from a number of different literatures from comedy to irony, to the bizarre and macabre, and he blends horrific descriptions of terrible death with elements of mystery and poetic flights of imagination. I will adopt a similar complex critical approach as that used by Qasim in the actual writing: I will undertake a fairly close reading of the story, examining possible allusions and similarities to other authors along the way. There will not be a

direct comparison between "The City of Winds" and the specific work of one particular writer, but a more tentative allusion to those who work in the perceived Western canon. This study might be seen as an approach which might lead to a more comprehensive comparison of some features of contemporary Arabic literature with its antecedents and equivalents in the Western world. At the moment there is an almost complete lack of any such comparison.

Before I start, I need to give at least a brief statement regarding translation. All art is inexact, and the art of translation is one of the most inexact of all. I have tried to keep both the poetry and sly humor of the writer while translating from the Arabic. Of course much is always lost in translation. An example might be the use of the word "whirlwind" throughout the story. In Arabic there are numerous words which describe various kinds of sandstorm and various wind funnels which may occur. But English, developed largely in a country in which sandstorms are not exactly a common occurrence, has few words for such phenomena. I have used just the one word, but it would be well for the reader, of both the translation and this study, to imagine a whole wealth of possible differences between the various whirlwinds. Some of them are more obvious than others, such as the difference between the warrior storms and the king of the winds, who are both different from the delightfully described child whirlwinds and the sensuality of the female wind who feeds the thirsty man water.

The various Arabic words connotating and differentiating different kinds of winds are just one example of the process whereby things are lost in translation. But it

is surely a worthy process if it can bring links between previously disparate and perhaps mutually alienated societies.

2- The Opening and Comedy

The short story starts in a rather unusual manner, namely, in the form of a letter, and a business letter at that. This is an "urgent call to the respectable Kuwaiti authorities", after which there is the more general plea of "to whom it may concern".[48] The "request for protection from Air Whirlwinds" (Qasim, 11) is rendered even more amusing than would already be the case by the addition of the formal indication of "subject" at the beginning. (Qasim, 11) Qasim asks the reader to put him/ herself in the position of a most likely bored government official receiving this rather strange letter. After a cursory reading of the opening paragraph the letter would probably be assigned to the trash can.

Qasim invites the reader to distance himself from Abdullah; on our first acquaintance with him, we are that bored official, but for some reason we carry on reading. The letter moves from being the apparent work of someone complaining about the weather, or believing himself possessed, to being something far stranger indeed. The change is signaled by, "I became a broker to the king of winds... I provide him with a human victim once each month."(Qasim, 11) Serial killer perhaps? be serial killer just waiting for his opportunity? The man says that he hates his job, and that the sandstorms are deliberately pursuing him, taunting him and reminding him of his duty. As the letter continues it becomes clear that, whatever the reader may think, Abdullah seriously believes that he is being pursued by the winds.

Qasim draws beyond the obvious laughter which will be provoked by the first part of the letter. He paints a picture of a malevolent and essentially alienating force within nature. If, as Eliot would have it, "April is the cruelest month", thus suggesting

that the rebirth of life is a terrible matter for that which is desolate, so the desert sandstorms, often beautiful (although dangerous) features of Arab life are rendered here deliberately destructive rather than merely passively occurring features of the natural world.[49] The fact that the letter is written as an appeal to a bureaucratic process increases the distance between man and nature. We try to put up walls between natural forces and ourselves vainly believing that we can control them. The most pristine example of this process is the government authority which tries to regulate man's relationship with nature. The coast guard would be a good example and, here, a letter addressed to some unnamed authority which is meant to protect Abdullah from the unstoppable.

The humorous and essentially futile nature of such a request is exemplified by the letter writer's suggestion that they "lock me in a basement under the ground until the situation is clear", a suggestion which seems to be taken all too literally by whatever forces are pursuing him as we find out in the coming paragraphs. He does indeed find himself underground, but not exactly in the manner in which he had envisaged. (Qasim, 13) The following section reminds me of a macabre horror or mystery story, perhaps one by Poe:

> Here I was, looking at my friend's head emerging from the soil, his eyes open and full of soft sand, his jaws gaping widely: the lower jaw buried with the rest of the body in the sand where the edges of one of the fingers appeared naked from the sand, stripped of human flesh. (Qasim, 13)

An investigation takes place. We have moved from the odd letter to the narrator of the story, an apparently trustworthy, influential Kuwaiti who is hopelessly out of his depth in the strange world into which his friend's letter has thrust him. The move from Abdullah's letter to the unnamed "friend" enables both further distance and proximity to be placed between Abdullah and Nature. The description of how his body was found in the desert is bizarre, terrifying, disgusting and yet strangely fascinating; at the same time it resonates with the descriptive power of Edgar Allen Poe. The accumulation of telling detail, recorded in apparently simple language, reminds one of "The Pit and the Pendulum" or "The Tell-Tale Heart". Muhammad has never been physically described up to this point as we have merely read his futile letter to the authorities. The only physical description of him is the ghastly state of his body as found in the desert sand. Qasim mixes the mundanity of any police search, "items such as small rocks, pieces of old fabric and other things were taken," with the bizarre state of his body. (Qasim, 14) Two worlds are clashing here: the world of supposedly sensible human endeavor in which an investigation logically proceeds, but also the world of the violence of nature, of apparently arbitrary destruction of a life. The world of the investigation seems cold and lifeless since Qasim's poetic power, which is considerable, only appears when the actual body is being described.

The image of a body buried so that only the upper jaw is showing, the lower jaw being underground, is indeed evocative. It is as though the corpse is trying to tell us something, it is caught in mid sentence, or mid scream. The mouth is both above and below the ground, words are forever set and lost in the gaping mouth. The body,

at least at this point when the investigator merely knows about the head, seems to speak of the terrors of nature. The man had sought to be protected underground, but the horrors which pursued him buried him in that ground. What he saw as protection actually killed him.

Once the body is raised from the ground, Qasim description is vividly horrifying:

> Suddenly, all the people present around the corpse were astounded and shocked by the horrible sight. I screamed loudly with horror and fear, some policemen ran toward us, while the others turned their backs to the corpse. (Qasim, 15)

The mention of the "some policemen" is a brief but evocative description, one which generates the small details which may be remembered in a horrific situation. The detail exemplifies the normality of the human situation, or at least that of the authorities methodically but unimaginatively making their way through the investigation, as compared to the terrors of what the natural world has apparently done. The difference is exemplified by the sight of the rest of the body:

> . . . from the neck down to the feet, the flesh [skin]had disappeared completely; and the skeleton was clean flesh, the bones had been burnt and the backbone, hipbone, the femur, and the legs were broken. All these appeared white, clean and dry. The moment the experts lifted the skeleton up, the leg bones were swinging in the air together. (Qasim, 15)

Death has come to the man in the most bizarre way, one which would appear to be impossible, at least in the rational world which we fondly believe we live in. A corpse

which is strangely divided: stripped to the bones below the ground, but merely a couple of days dead above it. The laughable understatements from the police exemplify their weakness, "I guess we are facing a complex enigma." (Qasim, 15) Like children looking at a car accident, or an animal transfixed by the lights of an oncoming car, the police can do nothing but watch and stare. This sense of powerlessness in the face of terror increases as the unnamed narrator and the policemen continue their investigation. There is no trace of acid on the body, no signs of any violent struggle or even any crime at all. The policeman and the narrator are pawns within a game which they do not understand: searching for clues in an ordinary manner will not work because they are dealing with the supernatural. But as with many Gothic stories, of which this could easily be considered an Arabic version, we need the normality of the witnesses to accentuate the abnormality and horror of the events which take place.

Like the narrators of *Frankenstein* or *Dracula* these people are ill- prepared to meet the challenges which they are offered. This is not important, however, for they are just tools for the major thrust of the story, which occurs in the recounting of the second, and final letter. The story starts with a letter from Abdullah, has an intermediary section in which his body is found, and then offers another letter in which the reasons for his strange death are explicated. One might wonder why the sections involving the narrator and the policeman were added at all: the man's body might have been found by some anonymous policeman and then we could have had the final letter. The most basic rule of a short story is to have nothing extraneous to

the plot, each sentence should drive the line of the narrative onwards. The narrator and the policeman, in the very normality of their lighting cigarettes, scratching their heads about what has happened, provide ironic contrast to the ghastliness of the man's death and the wonderful yet terrible flights of imagination and terror which lead to it

3- The Second Letter – Modern Gothic

The second letter is introduced in a typically apologetic tone by the narrator. He explains how the writer exhibited the normal virtues, as though expecting a chorus of disbelief from his readers. The opening paragraph of the letter is oddly normal and even mundane. Abdullah tells a rather predictable story of growing up, learning a trade and looking after his mother and younger siblings. He seems to live up to the portrayal which has just been presented of him by the narrator in his introduction to the letter. But the end of the paragraph speaks of what is surely a stressful life-change in an off hand, even casual manner:

> I gave all my attention to my mother and my brothers and sisters. One day my mother told me of her yearning to go traveling outside the country. She left with the children and I stayed home alone.
> (Qasim, 21)

The man has dedicated his whole life to looking after his birth-family, and then, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, his mother announces that she wants to take them all out of the country. People suddenly thrust into a lonely state tend to be rather vulnerable and perhaps prone to flights of imagination. They may invent company for themselves even when no-one is actually present. The man is, as I have said, left quite alone. But paradoxically, he is also open to many outside influences. He might, in Jean Baudrillard's terms, be defined as the schizo. Baudrillard defines the schizo thus:

> The schizo is bereft of every sense, open to everything in spite of himself, living in the greatest confusion. He is himself obscene, the obscene prey of the world's obscenity. . . he is the absolute proximity, the total insanity of things, the feeling of no defense, of no retreat. . . he can no longer

> produce the limits of his own being, can no longer play nor stage himself, can no longer produce himself as mirror. He is now only a pure screen, a switching center for all the networks of influence.[30]

To Baudrillard the "schizo" is not just the mentally ill homeless man walking the streets and talking to trees; we are all schizos in one form or another. Previously we could define the difference between ourselves and the outside world, but with the presence of "hyper-reality", literally too much reality, the boundaries between the individual and the outside world are broken down and cease to exist. The individual is merely a node through which other forces flow.

This is hardly unique to modern humans of course. In literature one might see a man being pursued by the Furies in "The Oresteia" in a similar light, or King Lear's struggles both within himself and with the storm which rages in that great play. In most of literature the outside forces tend to reflect a crisis within the protagonist: the violence of nature was an exaggerated version of whatever forces were tearing apart the main characters of the play or book. The storm reflects the chaos of Lear's decisions regarding the division of his kingdom, and his apparent madness. The Furies may represent the passions which can lead anyone to ruin if taken to an extreme.

But with the advent of Romanticism, and an appreciation of the magnificence and perhaps dominance of nature, another scene arises. Nature dwarfs man, he is merely part of a massive system which may destroy him at will, for all its beauty. In the modern world which Baudrillard portrays, the individual ceases to exist altogether.

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune are not aimed at illustrating an individual's faults, but are forces of a current which runs through individuals without even being noticed. Abdullah is this kind of individual as he drives away from his work this day. When the sand-storm surrounds him, he is merely a cog in a machine, at the mercy of forces which neither know nor particularly care for him, they merely see him as part of an obscene system which is trying to destroy them, and which must thus be hounded at every turn. The man is isolated and alone, his family having just left a few days before, but he is also very vulnerable to outside forces, to those which he would wish to be apart from but which he cannot avoid.

It is in this situation, completely alone and yet harassed by outside forces, that the hero of the story first comes across the old man:

> . . . while I was in this situation, a person standing by the road caught my attention. He appeared like a ghost in the middle of the driving dust hanging in the air. He was waiting for a bus or a kind person to give him a ride home. Or so I thought. (Qasim, 21)

The man is perhaps the ghost of the driving dust as much as being within it. He is part of the dust and the storm. Abdullah's naturally kind intentions are futile here, and the evocative nature of the language is similarly used by the apparent descent into melodramatic suspense with the "or so I thought"; a similar descent occurs with "I replied too quickly" later in the story. (Qasim, 21) These asides act to draw the reader away from the apparent seriousness of the situation for a moment to invoke the easy suspense of the old thriller in which one could predict the plot turns as

easily as the tides. The "old man" appearing out of nowhere and bringing a traveler to his doom is an almost universal image throughout literature. Besides, the most popular contemporary legend of English North America is that of the "ghostly hitchhiker" who when accepted as passenger in a car may influence the driver in many ways: from shocking him/her by sudden disappearance to more sinister consequences. He is perhaps most reminiscent of Teiresias as portrayed in *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles. The old man is wise, to a certain extent, but nothing if not constantly annoying. He also tells the hero a truth about himself which is vital but not exactly welcome.

The old man exhibits a surprising degree of mobility in this opening encounter. Thus, while he has a stick, "all of a sudden I saw the man's hand pressed on the door's handle", and then we have the dichotomy between the signs of his age and the actual agility he displays, "he leaned one of the hands on the stick and threw himself onto the front seat." (Qasim, 21) The old man is in need of help, but does not passively ask for it: he essentially invades the car. The boundaries between Abdullah and the outside world are again taken down and rendered uncertain. He should be in control (after all he is younger and in charge of the car), but this old man is actually more powerful.

The old man is as pushy as Teiresias, and Abdullah's good will seems just about as short-lived as Oedipus's: he is prepared to give him a short ride, but not one which will involve a twenty-mile round trip. The old man is persistent, he uses many tactical strategies to get his way around Abdullah, but there is always an "insistent tone" to what he is saying. (Qasim, 22) This insistence might be slightly threatening,

or at least rather disconcerting to the man who has at least let him into his car. It is so disconcerting that he gives in to the old man. The boundaries of self-control are once again invaded. He is the obscene prey to this obscene old man who cannot take no for an answer. As they travel on, within the flying sand of the storm, the old man eventually comes to the question which essentially dominates the whole story: "Where do you think this dust comes from?" (Qasim, 23)

Abdullah is a member of ordinary society; he believes that humans are essentially in control of the world and that the inconveniences of nature are just that - inconveniences. The sand is an inanimate object brought into motion by physical processes through changes in the weather. But he, like Oedipus, is blind to the truth which belies this apparently simple situation. The old man laughs at him, asks him questions which one might find rather sweet in an infant or young child. But in a strange old man such questions seem mocking. The old man knows where the sand comes from, as does Abdullah, but the old man also knows what controls that sand, which our hero does not know. His anger causes the old man to lower "his head, turned on the door hardly, leaned on his stick, and got out of the car without saying a word." (Qasim, 24) Qasim uses a telling detail once again (like the policeman running towards him earlier on) through the fact that the old man leans on his stick before he gets out of the car. This simple action returns him to just being an "old man," rather vulnerable and perhaps frightened of the younger man's anger.

The action produces in Abdullah the same reaction as might occur within the reader, a sense of being too harsh on this strange figure earlier on in the story. The

dust seems to become almost alive with its "intense and strange" movement around the car and then "the wind whispers" beneath him. (Qasim, 25) Abdullah has driven very fast away from the old man but now he has slowed down. The fact that he is in a car when he meets the old man, and that the car is mentioned time and again during the narrative is no accident. The car, and of course the fuel which drives it, has changed the Arab landscape permanently. It is the world's insatiable thirst for oil which has given Kuwait its great wealth, but which has also largely destroyed its natural environment. Thus the car is a perfect symbol of the modern man meeting the forces of nature which would seek to destroy him before he destroys them. More of the car image later.

Abdullah suddenly regrets that he has essentially turned the old man out of his car, for now he wants the comfort of talking to any human being. Nature is too much for him. As if meeting his wish, there is soon "a light knocking on the window of my car". (Qasim, 25) The old man and the dust seem even more synonymous this time as "the dust gushed into the car with his head". (Qasim, 25) Abdullah never wonders how the old man has miraculously caught up with his car after getting out of it some time before. As in a Poe story, the abnormal becomes normal and is not even questioned because the characters are swept along on the tide of events. Abdullah seeks to use his veil to hide from the dust, but it is as vain as trying to hide from the old man: the grains of dust, the old man and all that each represents will inevitably invade and conquer the space of the modern individual forced to face nature.

The old man's "coughing" is intriguing. (Qasim, 25) Perhaps he has inhaled enough of the dust to need to get rid of it, or perhaps he is becoming part of the dust, and it and the winds behind it, are reminding him of his duty. The sense of foreboding surrounding him increases as he states that "whatever happens, this is your fate" to which Abdullah replied "it's our fate, not only mine" . . . to which the old man does not reply. (Qasim, 26) This is the nearest that he has come to a direct threat so far, but at the moment it is implied. The atmosphere surrounding him is not necessarily evil, but rather suggestive: like the sand which he both embodies and which embodies him, he is all-pervasive but apparently unimportant when one reaches out and tries to hold the sand. But the sense of something terrible about to occur increases as the old man starts his talk of the winds again:

> Yes, the winds, at this hour, are getting very mad and bitter, and the reason is because they did not find their prey until this moment. I asked him, suspecting something was wrong with his mind.
> -"What do you mean their prey?"
> - "I will tell you later on." (Qasim, 26)

Abdullah might assume that the old man meant himself rather than Abdullah, but the narration never says so. He is recounting something from hindsight of course, he knows what this meeting with the old man will engender, yet there is no sense of bitterness or longing for another chance to do things differently; no, he is merely telling the story as it happened.

The old man says what has surely been on his mind for some time: his theories on the nature of the air. Air is alive and it can "eat, drink, feel . . . and vanish".

(Qasim, 26) The Arabic word means something between dying and vanishing, and it has a peculiarly non-organic feel. As San Francisco summer fog vanishes in the late morning so do the winds which are like wild animals. This is somewhat reminiscent of D. H. Lawrence's poem about the sparrow which dies but which never feels sorry for itself. It is always and only human beings who feel sorry for themselves other living things, be they animals or winds, merely disappear. There is something natural about this compared with man's desperate attempts to avoid and counter the inevitable. The old man has an apparently idealized version of the winds compared with the reality of the situation which we discover later in the story. Thus while he does admit that they "get mad", he quickly moves beyond this to a delightful recounting of a childhood memory. (Qasim, 29) The air which acts upon a paper plane does appear to be playing, or at least to be benign and helpful to a child's enjoyment. All of this talk leads to the strangely evocative phrase: "Did you see the air dancing?" (Qasim, 28) It is not "the air" or merely "air" but quite specifically "an air". Air becomes Air, a spirit which dances and flies freely through the . . . air. A Puck or an Aerial perhaps, and just as dangerous when you cross it. The old man is imaginative and evocative in this manner, but Abdullah is hopelessly out of his depth.

A complete empiricist, he believes something does not exist unless you can see it. But his attempts at keeping the old man's vision away from him are in vain as the latter eventually speaks of the "dance of the winds" and the fact that he has "seen The City of Winds". (Qasim, 28) While initially reminiscent of some bad schoolboy joke, "The City of Winds" is meant to evoke a place of utter freedom and power which is

nevertheless limited by the constrictions of being placed at one particular site. The city of winds captures our hero's imagination: "the old man has fascinated me with his talk, and he was controlling my mind and my imagination". (Qasim, 30) Nature has taken over even before they arrive at the actual seat of power. The supposedly sophisticated reasoning of the man of business is no match for the evocative power of the imagination. It might seem childish to suggest that the wind is alive, but is it not far more alive and thus able to change the world than any man when it chooses to be? If we see the utter chaos which the wind can wreak in the USA, the most technically advanced country in the world, we may glean a little of the old man's truth, and of the truth of Qasim's metaphor throughout the story.

The old man's truth is so influential that Abdullah agrees to go the "hundred and fifty kilometers" into the desert to visit this city. We might remember his reluctance to take the old man a mere fraction of the distance, and in the earlier case he might well have been saving his life. (Sandstorms can suffocate people, especially the old and the frail.) But now Abdullah is "fascinated" by the old man and "his strange talk", he is lost in the power of raw imagination. (Qasim, 29) As they pass on towards "The City of Winds," it becomes clear that some kind of double-time scheme is working here: "I looked at the car clock and it was near one-fifteen in the morning." (Qasim, 30) He had started off around lunchtime the day before but now more than twelve hours have passed. The events with the old man recounted thus far could not have taken up that much time. Perhaps some time is missing, or perhaps events are missing. It is one of the unusual aspects of the story which is hard to account for.

Perhaps as they get nearer "The City of Winds" the area is in a totally different time divorced in temporal as well as physical terms from the rest of the world.

This change is signaled by both the old man and the surrounding weather conditions, which increasingly come to reflect each other like identical winds. The old man starts to neglect "to name the areas now" and "I could see the road clearly after the winds had become calm". (Qasim, 30) There is a sense of ease, even of harmony now that they are approaching the actual City, and now that they are surely already within its realm of influence. The conversation between the old man and Abdullah turns back to the relationship between man and the winds [the author Qasim uses the winds as creatures like human so to speak] just before they arrive at the city, but instead of speaking in riddles, vague threats and excited gibberish, the old man apparently gives a detailed scenario of the battle between the two forces (human versus the winds). This conversation achieves surreal heights as the old man speaks of how mankind did different experiments on them [the winds], cut some of them into small pieces, exposed the air to extreme fires, brought them down to freezing temperatures and transformed them into a cold liquid. Mankind used the air as people use slaves to facilitate his business by locking some of them in car wheels and air pumps. (Qasim, 31) The image of the air as something alive, or rather as made up of a series of discrete individuals is bizarre and yet incredibly evocative. If the air was simply one huge organism, something akin to our rather hazy sense of Mother Earth here in the West, then the image would be less powerful. But the air as invisible, but definite, individuals, is something else again. Qasim brilliantly combines multiple

images. The car, so important throughout the story, uses the earth to take Abdullah and the strange old man to what will be immediate doom for one of them and eventual doom for the other. The car destroys the environment and also enslaves the air people within its tires: these slaves carry the two men to their own form of slavery, before surely being liberated themselves. There is a dense clarity to such imagery.

Suitably they arrive in the City just at dawn, the time when the environment is most beautiful, when even the most worldly and unimaginative person must stand and appreciate "the dawn … sending its fine skein over the sky while its blueness surrounds the dark which remained on the ground." (Qasim, 32) This beauty is soon turned into terror and a possibility of destruction as the whirlwinds appear and the old man suddenly vanishes. Up to this point his fantastical and essentially metaphoric properties have been suggested rather than fully explicated, but here they emerge fully. As the truth of his rambling but evocative stories becomes apparent even to Muhammad, he disappears. Qasim finds no need to account for his disappearance in rational terms; i.e. through a wind taking him or his simply getting out of the car and walking away, for the allegorical elements of the story, which rapidly turn it into a dark kind of fairy tale, are now dominant.

The whirlwinds try to destroy both Abdullah and his car, but are unable to do so, at least at first. The modern man is protected from the outside world by a piece of his machinery, by the physical sign of his apparent dominance over the natural world by his manipulation of tools. The car can protect for a while, but it cannot enable his escape, "I pressed on the gas pedal and the car moved a little and stopped . . . I knew

the wheels were sunk in the sand."(Qasim, 33) The environment above (the winds) and the environment below (the sand) are conspiring against this man, and Man in general. The wheels, full of compressed air slaves, refuse to co-operate, but merely bury themselves in the welcoming sand, allowing for the imminent liberation of their captive slaves. Even the sun, once beautiful and sheltering at dawn, now seems cold, "the sun sent its silvery, shiny light through the desert." (Qasim, 34)

But once Abdullah has left the temporary shelter of his car, once essentially his last flimsy protection from him and the outside world has been withdrawn, once he has become Baudrillard's schizo, the situation suddenly changes. He says that he walked among winds of various sizes "in the middle of wonderfully varying sounds." (Qasim, 33) There is beauty and fascination to these strange but gorgeous creatures. The fantasy turns beautifully evocative as "a small wind hovering and running to walk beside me, covering my hands with its circulating dust. . . I knew this was one of the wind's children come to hold my hand." (Qasim, 34) So while "The City of Winds" is perhaps more dangerous than the old man suggested, it is also more wonderful and beautiful. The introduction of the children of the winds is a testament to the completeness of Qasim's vision. Ordinary fairy tales/allegories, or even Gothic short stories, would not have included such details, they continue on their way towards apparently inevitable conclusions. But this is a more complex and thus compelling world. Yes, the winds hate Man and wish to destroy him, but their children are just like children anywhere, and their mothers, just like mothers anywhere, are protective, "I saw a little female wind coming fast towards me, and trying to hit me, but the giant

winds intervened." (Qasim, 33) Some winds hold his hand, some try to attack him, others protect him for some unknown but surely foreboding purpose. The winds, like men, are not homogeneous, but rather act on their own impulses for a variety of reasons. The description of the actual City expands on this vision, as he describes the variety of sounds that the winds make, "some of them sharp, high, soft, gentle, each whistle depends on the speed of the wind circulation around itself." (Qasim, 33) It is perhaps predictable that he should find the old man sitting with the King of the Winds but it soon becomes clear that the old man is perhaps as blind as Abdullah once was. When he congratulates Abdullah on showing "courage and strength" and notices that the King of the Winds appreciates these qualities too, the old man doesn't realize his own vulnerable situation. The old man coughs a lot, he is very old, not exactly the ideal "broker" to bring fresh victims to the King every month. And then he indulges in a piece of gratuitous sadism through describing in terrible detail what is supposed to happen to Abdullah. The winds slowly strip the man of his flesh, piece by piece in bits the size of sand.

Abdullah reveals that there is much more to him than appears at first glance as he brazenly offers to take the place of the old man: the sacrificed seeks to take the place of the one who has brought him to sacrifice. Role reversal is a classic feature of many allegories, as is the irony that the old man describes with such relish a terrible death which he himself will soon suffer. Many are condemned out of their own mouth, the old man no exception. There is, however, an interlude, until the reversal of roles is made permanent.

The interlude illustrates the complexity of these winds, and introduces an atmosphere of sensuality and even sexuality which was previously absent from the story. Abdullah is kept captive, and obviously becomes very thirsty. A "strange perfume" appears around him and "I saw a gentle and soft wind move around me, her form spread out everywhere, her space full of fine and tender sand." (Qasim, 38) Qasim also uses the winds in anthropomorphic way. The wind moves away and then returns "while pushing a small cloud . . . took a shape of water drops which fell into my mouth." He is literally enveloped and fed life-giving water by the female wind. In a sense he lives out the Freudian fantasy of a return to the womb followed by a life-saving rejuvenation. The fine sand, which may give terrible torture to a man may also give him life. The horrible deaths of the story and the beauty of some of the contacts between the Winds and Men accentuate one another through contrast.

Qasim suggests that a harmonious and beautiful relationship could occur if man stopped ravaging the environment suggests, to use Biblical or Quranic terms, a return to the Garden of Eden. The contrast between the violence and gentleness is accentuated by the fact that the scene with the female wind is placed between scenes of threatened and then actual violence.

Once the old man has been killed, Abdullah experiences a placid and delightful interlude of the Wind's party, apparently in his honor. But the reader knows that it is the old man's final words which are more important. Abdullah will not be able to provide a monthly victim, and so he too will have to face the wrath of the winds. The sounds which are "soft, relaxing and peaceful" now will become terrible in a short

space of time. The King grants safe passage to his new slave to exit the city and he finds an apparently idyllic scene:

> We climbed a little hill, as we reached its peak, I saw my car parked behind it. I lifted my face toward the sky, in silence, I thanked God for his mercy and generosity. (Qasim, 40)

The car, the symbol of man's destruction of this environment, is the cue for Abdullah to thank God. He has apparently learnt everything, but has actually learnt nothing. It is thus suitable and apt that this new broker to a King should in fact become his own required sacrifice. Unable to betray his people, he must go to his death in their place. But, one feels, the pattern will continue.

In "The City of Winds" Qasim has produced a wonderfully evocative short story which can be read on its own terms as merely a story, or as a complex allegory on the relationship between modern Man and the natural environment. One could read it to a child and he/she would understand and enjoy it. But so can you and I, on a different level.

That is the true magic of this story. It is *outside, environmental* forces that "haunt" the characters of the story: little of the pain, mystery and suffering stems from within, except for their reliance on modern tools such as the car. Magic can of course come in many different forms, and in this story Qasim provides a view of the outside world possessing human characteristics of anger, possession and jealousy. The outside world reflects inner problems, but it is the outside world that dominates. In this sense it fits in with a story such as *The Fall of the House of Usher* in which the

things in the immediate vicinity of the House reflect the degradation within. The growth of fungi and the stagnant, disgusting pool of black water reflect the incestuous history of the Usher family heritage. The house and its surroundings are personified, much as the desert winds are in Qasim's story.

Yet another side of the supernatural genre in general, and the ghost story in particular, is that which concentrates on the *within* rather than the *outside*. "The Painting of Wishes" mixes, in Qasim's unmistakable, inimitable fashion elements of other stories while being uniquely his own creation in the end. Resonant of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and other narratives of magic paintings, "The Painting of Wishes" illustrates how Qasim is as effective in dealing with an inner sense of supernatural mystery as he is with terrible outside forces that threaten us. The environment plays a great role in "The Painting of Wishes", but it is clearly an extension of inner turmoil rather than a force to be reckoned with in its own right.

Chapter II

"The Painting of Wishes": A Story of Evil Spirits

> -"Salem, the boat has disappeared. The boat has disappeared!" Mustafa almost collapsed. I helped him to gain strength by taking him out of the room quickly. The old woman followed us without saying anything. We were almost in the street when we saw her closing the door behind us, but no, she was not the same old woman we had seen a while ago. The person was an old man with a shining white beard and mustache, and a white face like paper. (Qasim, 183)

Painting, Evil Spirits and the Supernatural

The sea, constantly in motion, an apparent desert and yet full of life holds a wonderful fascination for all men and women. The sea may give life and yet it may also kill. From the sirens of Greek legend through to the Flying Dutchmen, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, and onto legends of the present-day Bermuda triangle, the sea seems to echo with the voices of those who have perished in it. The proximity and the speed with which life may turn into death suggest a ghostly nature.

Paintings are an apparently frozen moment in time; they preserve a particular instant and also the sensibility of the painter, and yet they also preserve the dead in a living state. For instance, Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn" deals with a similar theme. Glancing at any Renaissance painting we may glimpse the long dead as if they were still alive. It is thus not surprising that the painting has a large role to play in many supernatural/ghost stories. It is only one step away from being alive, and a ghost might perhaps easily inhabit its apparently static form. Furthermore, many old traditional cultures believe in the fact that the soul of person is captured by picture or

photo and that may be very dangerous. Yet, in Islamic tradition, I must mention the fact which is well-known to Muslims, and would influence a Muslim reader that there a traditional prohibition against the representation of human likeness in respect to leave and cherish such a picture would in itself be a risky transgression. Therefore, one can say that in one sense a painting quite literally *is* the ghost of the past; it is a constant reminder of a past, frozen and repeating itself. Paintings are often associated with special occasions such as weddings, and they succeed in simultaneously preserving the moment while creating an evocative melancholy in the observer. We are reminded of all that is gone and can never be again, of "those blue remembered hills where once I walked, but may never wander again."[51] Paintings and pictures are also a well-known folkloric motif, "Picture comes to life, and ghost like picture, and magic picture". (See endnote 33)

Paintings have perhaps been somewhat supplanted by photographs as a method of preserving likeness, but are still used by the wealthy to preserve or evoke some special occasion. In Qasim's "The Painting of Wishes" the painting presents a complex symbol, both an abstract force representing a general societal unease and also a vehicle for somewhat hallucinatory experiences that in the Western world might seem to belong to a drug trip. Imagination and reality become mixed and even confused so that the reader is not sure which is which. The story is strangely reminiscent of Stephen's King's *Christine* in its sense of a vertiginous fall into fantasy and horror; the reader cannot distinguish between the narration and the effect the events are having on the narrator. Qasim asks the sophisticated question of how much

we are meant to believe the narrator: the omniscient and reliable narrator of many of his stories has disappeared into a more problematic but interesting figure. If we cannot trust the narrator, then who can we trust?

As we will discover in "The Deserted Hut", Qasim's supernatural/ghost stories combine elements of the structure of classical supernatural/ghost stories and a whole new genre which might be identified as Qasim's supernatural story. "The Painting of Wishes" starts with a man hearing of the death of a friend. Ghost stories, or, as this may here be more accurately called, supernatural stories, often start with the announcement of a death. The death, in typical ghost stories, occurs at the beginning of the tale. In typical stories, there is a proximity between the land of the living and the land of the dead. The living are put on notice of their own mortality and are prepared for their close proximity to the newly dead, or the living death that the ghost seems to represent.

> Yaqoub Ahmed Ibrahim Alsammak: The Fisherman, has passed away at the age of fifty-seven. A funeral will be set for him at eight in the morning . . . we all belong to God and we are all going back to him. This news was broadcast last Friday evening from Kuwait television . . (Qasim, 103)

So starts the story and once again we are introduced to the death, not through the person actually seeing the death or hearing about it first-hand, but through the remoteness and yet the certainty of mass-media. The instruments of a modern age (the telephone, the television, air conditioning) provide a contrast to the basically traditional subject matter. Anomie and alienation are necessary to create the correct

amount of vulnerability for the contact with the ghosts and the supernatural to occur in as powerful a manner as possible.

The news of the death does not cause great pain or sadness in the listeners, indeed, "we were not paying attention when this news reached us because we were playing cards."[52] As in many modern households, the television is on as a kind of comforting background noise rather than for any particular reason. Inundated with stimuli from all sides, we do not even notice startling and sad news such as this. But death is common, perhaps the most common thing of all and so the lack of reaction is understandable. But one out of the number is not unaffected. He has "a sullen face" and he "starts to stare at the television screen" before he "stopped playing and threw down his cards."(Qasim, 103) A single individual rather than the group is affected by the news: the isolation effect of this type of story becomes apparent. Knowledge may be the route to power, but it may also be a route to isolation. Psychological isolation leads to the need for physical isolation and so he moves to the far corner of the room and "tears started to flow from his eyes." (Qasim, 103) One of the men asks Mustafa, the one crying, whether he knows the dead man and he confirms the fact.

Qasim accentuates the normal distracting elements of the modern world in the following section, while commenting on the fact that Mustafa is somehow able to avoid them, or at least ignore their influence for a while:

> In this atmosphere of people talking, the sound of coffee cups clinking, the voice of guns shooting on the TV, and the noisy sound of the air-conditioning in the dining room, Mustafa still stayed in the corner with his head down, absent-minded and in deep thought. (Qasim, 104)

The modern world, with all its constant distractions, cannot touch him now. He is lost with his memory of the dead man and within the extremity of his emotions. In a sense, Mustafa has, at least temporarily, more in common with the dead than with the living. The first mention of something beyond a normal death soon comes, as Mustafa explains to the narrator that the dead man "was not sick at all...the evil spirits took his life." (Qasim, 105) In contrast to "The Deserted Hut", in which the ghost is one that wishes to communicate a terrible act perpetrated by men, here in "The Painting of Wishes" the man is claimed to be actually killed by evil spirits. In the Islamic religious tradition, humans should not deal with spirits, because they lead to trouble. Here we have genre which might be termed supernatural possession in which ordinary people become possessed and eventually destroyed by evil spirits that do not belong in this world.

Mustafa seems to know the truth about the dead man, but he feels somewhat ambivalence about the whole matter. Thus he says that "he was a very good person, and he lived a very unique life, full of secrets, and I think that he died away from people."(Qasim, 105) This refrain of "away from people" occurs several times in the story, giving the dead man a distant, remote aspect. Once again we also have a narrator and a confidant close to him who will reveal the truth about the terrors of the world. The narrator acts as a bridge between the supernatural and the reader, thus enabling the reader to cross over from what is surely a placid world to one full of

wonders and terror. Qasim uses a structural technique that has been repeated constantly, and some might say interminably, in literature of this type.

Mustafa is about to open up his story and our narrator, very much the modern man, has a rather short attention span and so soon goes "to watch the fight between the police and the gangsters in the movie."(Qasim, 106) Reality, with its hesitancy and incompleteness, its lack of clear structure, is rather less compelling than the formulaic battles on the television screen; those we have complete control over as we may watch them or not watch them according to our wishes, and which are neatly packaged. Film possesses a structure that we may comfortably predict, unlike a friend who tells us that a fisherman died from "evil spirits." The narrator returns to the easy comfort of the television, away from reality. Once again, we have a decidedly *modern* feature subsumed within a superficially *traditional* structure.

Mustafa pursues him, however, saying that "I cannot tell you anything in this loud and noisy atmosphere…I will meet you tomorrow evening and I will tell the whole story."(Qasim, 107) Suspense, an essential structural element of all these stories, enters Qasim's literary technique at this point. The narrator must be removed from his ordinary environment, one full of the noises, gadgets and diversions of modern life, in order to enter the supernatural world that the story is focused upon. Again, the reader is drawn along with him into the situation, removed from his normal world and taken along for the narrative ride.

Suspense is increased as the narrator reads in the morning newspaper that the dead man that Mustafa will tell him about, Yaqoub, was in fact found floating under

his boat in pieces, having been attacked by sharks. This would seem to be a conventional, if terrible, death. A shark is a supreme predator, but hardly makes it into the realm of the "evil spirits": it is decidedly corporeal in nature. The suspense increases because Mustafa refuses to tell the narrator any more, reminding him on the phone that "certainly the evil spirits wiped him out, and maybe I am the cause of that," but then he refuses to say any more, saying, "our meeting is tonight at eight."(Qasim, 109)

As in "The Deserted Hut", the phone provides a means of communication, but one that is frustrating in nature as it only provides a partial glimpse of the truth rather than the whole truth. We hear a disembodied voice, and this voice gives us an incomplete message, making us wait in suspense for the truth. The truth of the supernatural world may not be one that we really wish to find, but it is the truth nevertheless. Both the narrator and the reader are quietly but inevitably drawn into this world, a step-by-step process which makes the whole more believable than a quick submersion.

The next day the narrator is "standing before Mustafa's house at eight", ready and even eager for the meeting. Mustafa invites him in and begins his story with a disclaimer that often occurs in this type of story:

> I do not know where I should begin, nor do I know where it will end . . . I saw these strange things with my own eyes that nobody will believe, and if I had not witnessed these things myself I would say that they were just wild imagination. (Qasim, 110)

It is first hand observation that compels belief, not the third hand kind of communication that the telephone and television represent. But Mustafa says that if another man told him the story he is about to tell, he would not believe him. He can, at least at this point, believe the evidence of his own eyes, but he is not entirely sure. "Wild imagination" is a strong phrase, causing the reader to wonder whether Mustafa is starting to doubt the evidence of his own senses. This feeling of disorientation, of a mistrust of the senses that we normally take for granted, is a classical feature of this type of literature that concentrates on a hyper-real experience of the world. There is "too much" reality in Qasim's stories, and it is this, as much as the ghosts, that haunts the characters so effectively.

After Mustafa's talk of wild imagination, he almost casually asks the narrator whether "you have seen the deceased one day?" (Quasi, 110) The narrator doesn't think so, but Mustafa persists, telling him that he saw him on a corner selling fish in a local market. Mustafa obviously knows more about the man than just a casual interest would permit him. The market-seller apparently became a professional fisherman, still carrying on selling his fish in the market, but "he carried on fishing for a long time, until he became addicted to it."(Qasim, 111)

"Addicted" is a strong word, but it is essential to understanding the story. Obsession, addiction and compulsive behavior are all key structural themes in supernatural stories. The characters often have a tendency towards being possessed, albeit by very ordinary things, before they become possessed in the more literal sense by the supernatural phenomenon that overwhelms them. Curiosity can be dangerous

for men as well as cats, and the one-dimensional single-mindedness of obsession can lead people completely astray. Fishing is a wonderful occupation, especially for those who are in the enviable position to combine a hobby and a way of making a living, who wouldn't want to be paid for what they love doing, but any virtue taken to an extreme becomes a vice, and this is the case here. The sea is also perhaps a cliché symbol, but an effective one all the same. The sea is harbinger of life and yet one false move on it can cause death. Sailors tend to have a heightened sense both of their external environment and of the inner landscape of their souls. It is thus apt that a fisherman, constantly on the brink of death, should become involved in a supernatural world.

Mustafa first met the now dead Yaqoub while the latter was trying to unhitch his boat from the trailer on his car. The man was apparently too old to achieve this simple act on his own and yet he had confidence that he will catch fourteen of the most elusive fish, promising that he will give Mustafa half of them as a thank you for his help. A man who is so old and decrepit that he cannot even unhitch his own boat is hardly very likely to be a good fisherman, let alone the master-fisherman as is implied by his promise. There are three strange things about the promise. First, as already mentioned, that an unskilled old man could be so confident in his fishing prowess. Second, the fact that the old fisherman is so exact in his promise: it is not about fourteen, but an exact number, as the narrator puts it, "how did he know that he would catch one, ten, twenty, or that he would catch anything?"(Qasim, 113) Third is also the rather surprising fact that the type of fish that he wants to catch, the nagrour,

was not even in season at this time and so there should be none available. Yet the old man is completely confident. The description of the old man's boat disappearing into the sea is vital:

> He waved at me and left. I kept looking at him going farther and farther into the water. I saw the water spread out from either side of the boat. I continued to look at it, until the boat became a black dot surrounded by beautiful, white flying water. In a few minutes the boat had disappeared into the wild and huge sea. (Qasim, 114)

Qasim is always exact in his detail, and here it is added layer upon layer to create meaning. The old man does not disappear quickly into the sea but he is rather slowly swallowed by it as if he were becoming part of it. He belongs in the sea and yet within a few minutes it is as if he does not exist, he has "disappeared" into a "wild" and "huge" sea. The sea itself seems to be alive, having an almost predatory aspect.

Mustafa returned to the docks in the late afternoon, making sure to tell the narrator that he did not "need" the fish, but rather that he was just curious as to whether the old fisherman had indeed managed to catch the exact number of this supposedly unavailable fish. He is curious and yet ostensibly disinterested, he does not really care whether the old man returns with the fish or not. The old man does not arrive until late, and Qasim describes the other fishermen, most of whom merely have "baskets of small fish." But when the old man's boat returns, he is received with a cry of "Look! The nagrour season has begun." Then, "I saw his white mustache give some beauty to his smiling and yet weak face . . . the sun had burned it."(Qasim, 115)

The old man is triumphant, yet nature, which has miraculously given him exactly the correct number of rare fish, has left its mark in less positive ways as well.

Once again Mustafa helps the old man "pull the boat up from the water and connect it to the car"; the incongruity of the man's apparent incompetence on land and genius on sea is subtly but definitely accentuated once again. (Qasim, 115) Mustafa, at first, refuses to take the fish, ostensibly because he only returned to the dock out of curiosity as to whether the old man's prediction would be correct, but perhaps less tangibly because he feels there is something strange about the fact that the fish are there anyway. Nature, and especially the sea, is rarely predictable, and virtually never absolutely reliable as it seems to be for the old man. There is something unnatural about this.

After this description of the initial meeting between Mustafa and the old man, the narrator interjects as the voice of reason: "Maybe this is not such a strange thing. He might have run into an area of water that was full of this kind of fish." (Qasim, 116) The narrator says what the reader may be thinking, returning us to the world of the rational coincidence that contrasts to the irrational wonder of the old man's prediction coming about through skill, or other means. But Mustafa soon returns us to the hyper-real world of the fisherman. The fisherman reveals a remarkable and, one might say, very unrealistic knowledge of the life-cycle of the Nagrour fish. "The Nagrour are like the Newaibi and Zebaidi, they migrate from one place to the other . . . you can only see them twice a year in April and September, the female fish arrive in the gulf and spawn their eggs in the far eastern muddy area." (Qasim, 117) And so it

continues, as Mustafa displays an apparently encyclopedic knowledge of the fish. It is a knowledge that is unexplained.

This is another common feature of the structure of the supernatural story in general. Characters reveal both an interest in and knowledge of facts that would appear at first to be rather unlikely. They have the single-minded, concentrated vision of the obsessive, and they are often obsessed with the most mundane things. Thus Mustafa would not find the old man's fishing exploits as amazing as he does without the fisherman's detailed knowledge about the life-cycle of the fish that he predicts he will catch. It is his fascination with and detailed knowledge of the "ordinary" that leads him into an exploration of the extraordinary. In this manner the writers of incredible (in the literal meaning of the word) and bizarre supernatural stories allow for empathic association on the part of the reader. If we cannot at least empathize and put ourselves in the place of the characters, then the story will fail to hold us. Most people enjoy hobbies, and they possess a greater knowledge of the subject-matter of that hobby than would perhaps be equal to its overall importance within the world. For fishing take your own hobby, Qasim is silently suggesting, and then put yourself in Mustafa's position.

It seems that the nagrour (the fish) should have already migrated to their mysterious homes and that "if you search the whole of this sea, you will not be able to find any trace of them, except for the few that were left behind."(Qasim, 117) So the apparently mundane catching of a few fish takes on deeper significance, Qasim has begun leading the reader into a world in which things are not what they appear to be.

Often supernatural stories do not have a delicate or well-conceived element of characterization, as the characters are often cardboard cut-outs of "the obsessive" (Mustafa) or "the skeptic" (the narrator), but Qasim introduces a note of this normally ignored part of literary technique as the narrator says:

> I did not want Mustafa to continue to talk about the fish, as I knew he would go into great depth on the subject, so I had a hard time getting him back to the main topic . . . Mustafa lost his patience with me, so I promised him that I would just be a listener to his story. (Qasim, 117)

Thus we have the good-natured bantering of two friends who are kindly aware of the other's foibles. The narrator knows Mustafa's tendency to ramble and digress from the subject, while Mustafa knows of the narrator's tendency to interrupt. Each reminds the other of their foibles and then they continue. In such apparently small but telling ways, Qasim humanizes these characters, making them more real than the fantastic nature of the story would seem to allow for. The very mundanity of their characters contrasts with and accentuates the strangeness of the actual story. Each complements and reflects on the other.

Mustafa continues with his story, saying that when he returned to the beach the next morning the old man "was on his boat when I arrived." Thus on the second day of the story the old man does not need any help getting his boat unhitched from his car's trailer. His competence on the sea seems to be spreading into his land life, or, more darkly, whatever allows him to fish with perhaps superhuman skill on the water is starting to spread its influence into other areas of his life. This day it will be

"twenty seven nagrour fish!" (Qasim, 118) and with that he disappears into the horizon.

A reader versed in literary traditions will begin to smell a bargain that can be found in *Faust* or *The Arabian Nights*. Being able to catch an exact number of fish on one day might be a coincidence, however unlikely, but on two consecutive days implies something entirely different. Mustafa pauses the story at this point and explains, in a vital paragraph quoted at length below, the origins of his fascination with the old man:

> Salem, I really do not know the reasons that I became attached to that good man. The moment he left, I was already missing his fatherly face. Indeed, I felt the feeling of a son towards his father, the same feeling of any human who has lost his real father, and who finds someone older than him and dignified. So I felt like my father had just left me to catch fish. I returned home with this kind of feeling. (Qasim, 118)

The old man represents much more than some old eccentric that Mustafa has a passing interest in: he is starting to take the place of Mustafa's real father who, we may assume, has already died. The fisherman represents an origin, the place that we come from, the sense that creates our attachment to our parents. As when we are children, the old man is performing apparently impossible and heroic deeds, just as a small child sees his father as the strongest man in the world, whatever the truth of the situation.

Qasim is suggesting that perhaps all human beings are like children before the supernatural reality of the world. We are apparent masters of the physical world that we see around us much of the time, except for great forces such as the ocean, the

desert, and the weather. But occasionally we are faced with the true power of nature and are left silently staring. For instance, the ocean and desert are visible - and one can imagine other visible forms in which this power of nature manifests itself. This power is something often invisible, intangible and yet utterly potent. We stare at it like a small son at his father, wondering and yet fascinated, impotent and yet compelled. So the characters are, as in many supernatural stories (for example, *Frankenstein* or *Dracula*) taking on a symbolic significance and stature way beyond their actual interest as individual characters. Like all children, we must eventually understand that our parents are mere mortals just as ourselves, and that moment of truth may be damaging or affirming depending upon how we have been brought up. Like in "The Deserted Hut" we feel that the moment of truth must arrive eventually, but for the moment we are not surprised that the fisherman arrives back at the shore with "twenty-seven, exactly twenty-seven fish!" (Qasim, 119)

At this point one might feel that the story has little further to go, and yet Qasim succeeds in moving it to a different dimension when the next morning Mustafa arrives at the docks only to find the fisherman dressed for a day on land. He says that despite the fact that the "sea is calm . . . the wind will blow soon and the sea will become rough." (Qasim, 120) Mustafa looks at the sky and sees nothing but blue and remembers that the radio forecast had predicted days of sunny, hot weather. And yet the fisherman is sure that the weather will be bad. The technology of the modern world forecasts good weather, and yet the fisherman says otherwise. The story began with a television station telling of the fisherman's death and now in a flashback we

hear of the weather forecast. At one point the fisherman was more powerful than modern technology but eventually the latter, with its quiet sense of invincibility, tells of his death.

As Mustafa and the fisherman watch how the storm does indeed materialize, and become so violent that they see "boats from far away struggling with the huge waves, trying to get to shore." (Qasim, 122) The sea has turned as it is wont to do, it has changed and now the productive, lucrative environment has become one in which men must struggle for their lives. We feel that one day it will surely also turn on the fisherman as well, and of course we know that it will as the story starts with the news of this death. As in"The City of Winds", there is a kind of inevitable doom surrounding the story, as we know what will occur: the reader is just waiting for the bells to toll. In "less than an hour, the calm sea was transformed into huge waves colliding with each other, and the clear blue sky had disappeared behind a curtain of fine dust." (Qasim, 121) The sea has also become virtually alive as one "huge wave crawl like a speedy python towards the shore, swallowing the small waves in its way and then throwing them onto the beach." (Qasim, 121)

In the midst of this terrifying description Mustafa asks the narrator whether he would like another cup of coffee. The narrative flow and power is disrupted by Qasim, obviously with intent rather than by accident. He undercuts the terror of the description, stressing the normality of the characters vis-à-vis the strangeness of the circumstances that are being recounted. One might feel that such ordinary people would be no match for the supernatural events that are surrounding them. With the

unexpected storm swirling around them, the fisherman promises to tell Mustafa his secret, but he must come to his house before hearing it.

The storm "continues for two days, dust accumulating in houses, ships movements on the sea stopped, traffic in the city reduced, especially in the evening when the streetlights disappeared into flying dust." (Qasim, 122) The storm is defined in terms of its effect upon human beings, and its effect is rather devastating. Life has come to a halt, but the fisherman seems quite content with the situation. As Mustafa comes to his house the next day he, the narrator and we as the readers, are left with the question as to whether the fisherman merely predicts with uncanny ability or whether he is somehow in control of the natural world. Can he cause a storm much as he can forecast the number and type of fish that he will catch: what more is possible? The theme of apparently superior power given to those who dabble in the supernatural is a theme that runs throughout the genre of supernatural short stories. It is the positive side of the bargain for those, from witches to mediums, who dabble in the darker side of life. But their power is always double-edged, it is pride that comes before a fall, and the higher they rise the further they have to fall.

Another feature of this genre is the plot-twist in which the narrator (or the narrator twice-removed as Mustafa is) must come into the sphere of influence of the protagonist. Usually he must come to the house, a building that often symbolically represents the state of being of the one immersed in the supernatural. This is the case in "The Painting of Wishes" as "the house was old, covered with cement… there were many cracks in the outside walls, cracks that revealed the sea-stones that made the

walls." (Qasim, 124) The house is foreboding, old, yet showing its age and clearly linked to the sea.[53] It is a symbolic representation of the old man, and Mustafa can see him through one of the windows, sitting quite alone in the only room visible. Narrator, characters and readers are all brought within the realm of the protagonist through this device and thus prepared for their ultimate, and direct, contact with the supernatural. Yaqoub, the fisherman, lives very simply with few physical possessions. Again, the one in direct contact with the supernatural is often an ascetic, bored or at least disinterested with the material possessions of the world. He tells Mustafa that he was married at the age of sixteen but that his wife had died: another common generic theme, isolation from family through alienation or death.

The fisherman also communicates the telling detail that he did not marry again because he was still in love with his wife. It is unusual to maintain such powerful emotions as being "in love" for a dead person after a period of mourning. The fact that he did so suggests that the fisherman is more finely attuned to the world beyond this one than is the normal person. Perhaps he belongs more in the world of the invisible and the supernatural, and therefore he can maintain his passion for a dead woman after all.

The fisherman takes Mustafa into the inner recesses of his house, and: "he took out a chain full of keys from his pocket, selected one that seemed bigger than the rest of the keys, yet it was one that resembled the gray lock itself. " (Qasim, 126) Locks and large keys are a staple of supernatural literature, the symbolism is once again almost cliché in its certainty. There is some secret held behind the door, both literally

and metaphorically. The ultimate secret is perhaps whether there is some controlling force in the universe, and the fisherman is about to reveal at least part of the answer to that question . The key symbolizes his power, his free will to reveal or to hide, and the lock represents how jealously he has guarded that knowledge up until this time.

The fisherman opens the door and the first thing that Mustafa notices is "the smell of the sea that dominates the room", and upon the narrator asking him what he means, Mustafa goes into an impressionistic account of an almost hallucinatory experience as:

> I imagined hearing the snarling of the waves, the crowing of a sea gull from far away and in the middle of that I heard a strange voice. . . something like a human who is whimpering from heartache, or a fisherman who sings a sad song. (Qasim, 126)

All of this pervades the atmosphere of the room when he first enters it, and yet it is also what he "imagined" hearing. But imagination, in contrast to the beginning of the story, does not imply that the experience is any less real or important. The sounds and impressions come from far away, and they stopped suddenly as the fisherman points to the painting that was hanging on the wall of the room.

This painting is like a magic crystal that predicts the situation in the sea. So the title, "The Painting of Wishes" finally makes sense. This is a painting that can predict the future, and it shows a man fishing in the sea, a man whose whole attention is "staring at one tiny spot in the water, the meeting point of the water and his fishing line." (Qasim, 127) The man in the picture is looking to catch a large fish in the painting but no actual fish is seen. The fisherman tells Mustafa that he stares at the

painting night and day, hoping that he could see through the "obscurity" of the painting to the big fish. But he never sees it. This is obviously symbolic of all men looking at the mystery of the universe and attempting to glean sense from it or at least to get some sense of the structure that we all face. As he stares at the picture the fisherman starts to hear and smell the same things that Mustafa did when he entered the room.

At this point the story becomes very strange as it seems that the fisherman also sees the fisherman in the painting move from one place to another. This is a device used by M. R. James in "The Mezzotint". One certainty of the world is that people in paintings do not move: they are fixed in time, and it is their fixity that is so evocative and somehow haunting. But, as in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, this painting can change, apparently according to the mood or the wishes of the man that is looking at it. The fisherman in the picture can change his position on the water, making it more likely that he will find the fish that the observer wants him to find. The water starts to move and the boat goes up and down with the movement of the waves. So the apparently random luck of a boastful fisherman at the beginning of the narration turns into a pointedly supernatural experience. It is a painting that is either a window into the imagination, a predictor of the future or some strange mixture of the two.

The painting has become a kind of film in Mustafa's eyes, but the narrator gives, as ever, the practical skeptic's point of view, saying that he believed that he was "sitting before a lunatic" (Qasim, 129) when Mustafa seemed to be confirming the fisherman's hallucinatory experience with the painting. The man in the painting

catches ten fish, and Yaqoub goes out onto the sea trying to catch at least the same number; there he finds a man apparently drowning in the sea, only to discover that it is the same man as in the painting. The story takes on a completely supernatural feel. Now we do not know whether the painting reflects an actual reality somewhere in the world, somewhat like a remote camera, or whether it causes a certain reality to occur depending on the imagination of the observer.

Yaqoub follows the "drowning man" apparently out of curiosity, not seriously trying to help him until he dove deep into the water and disappears. Echoes of Stevie Smith's famous refrain, "I was far too far out all my life, and not waving, but drowning come to mind." [54] How do we know who is asking for help and who is not? How does the fisherman know whether he has merely seen a foreshadowing of this event in the painting or whether he caused it to come about through his unconscions wishes and his imagination? Qasim, along with many other supernatural storywriters seems to be suggesting that the neat and reliable divisions between truth and illusion, between fantasy and reality are not as neat or certain as we may think. The human beings in these stories inhabit a gray area between the two, uncertain of which way to go or what precisely is happening to them.

It seems, bizarrely, that the man *became* the fish, for Yaqoub throws his line into the water where the man dove underneath and disappeared, and manages to start catching all the rare fish that he had been boasting about to Mustafa. Supernatural ghost stories in general play upon the Jungian race memory that we all are supposed to possess, linger upon the knowledge that we all have that once we were the hunted

rather than the hunter. The feeling we have all had at night when walking along a dark road that we are being watched; it is that feeling that is strangely (but brilliantly) distorted by Qasim's unique imagination. The swimmer, a creature out of his element seems to become a fish, one completely at home in the water that only exists to be caught by the fisherman. All seem caught within a circle of destruction, and it is only this destruction that seems to be certain. Every day he does the same thing, he stares at the painting:

> and the life inside the painting flows again, and the man inside the painting started pulling fish one after another . . . he returned to the sea and saw the ghost man swimming . . . until he disappeared deep into the water . . . Yaqoub cast his line and caught the same number as he had wished for the day before. (Qasim131)

This is the first mention that the man may in fact be a ghost or evil spirit. In what sense is he a ghost within this particular story and within the structure of the supernatural ghost story in general? It would seem that perhaps he is the ghost of a dead fisherman, come back to lead the fisherman to a place where he will catch many fish. This is an interesting variant on the theme of the ghost leading people astray, for up to this point in the story at least, this is a *good* and *beneficial* ghost: one that enables a fisherman to avoid storms and to catch as many fish as he sees in his "painting of wishes". But we know that eventually the system goes awry, as the man ends up being eaten by a shark. He is perhaps like the male version of a Greek siren, apparently "beautiful" in what he offers, but eventually deadly. He seduces the

fisherman into believing he has power, thus a Faustian pact again, but eventually kills him, just as Faust eventually loses his soul to Satan.

So Qasim uses a variety of different images and literary conventions/ allusions to provide a complex, kaleidoscopic supernatural experience. "The Painting of Wishes" is thus a kind of amalgam of a series of other stories, both in the Western and Arab traditions. The repetition of the action (the fishing) is in a sense similar to the repetition of the action of storytelling in *The Arabian Nights*. The repetition is successful, but we feel that it is bound to come to an end, and a painful end at that. As we know that the fisherman will end up dying in the story, a sense of suspense is replaced by a sense of foreboding. Every action seems to take on a deeper meaning, and we are watching out for the action that will lead to his downfall. As in a Shakespearean tragedy we know the end, and it is not the end in itself that is of the greatest interest, but rather how we get there, the route towards the inevitable downfall.

The question as to whether the painting creates or predicts occurs again when Yaqoub says that "one evening in winter, I saw the waves violently crashing into each other and the boat struggled to stay stable in the middle of the huge waves… and the next day an unexpected storm did indeed occur." (Qasim, 122) The painting does not move until a person looks at it for some time, so it seems that it is the person's imagination that somehow is captured by the painting and then turned into reality in the outside world. The constant jabs from the narrator towards Mustafa, "I think he played with your mind, do you want me to believe that a normal oil painting really

became a television screen? . ." become increasingly less effective as the narrative power of the story takes over. (Qasim, 133) Reality is the painting, unreality is the ordinary world that the narrator inhabits.

Eventually, as we all knew was inevitable, Mustafa tells of the final time that he and the fisherman experienced the painting. This time the relationship to sirens is more clear, as he hears "faraway voices like the snarling waves, sea birds and then a sad song. . . the voices became louder and louder and then they stopped." (Qasim, 135) They lure the man into the picture and then, once he is captured, they stop, to be replaced by the more directly powerful visual effect of the painting. This time the fisherman in the painting is caught in a storm and then "lifted up his head and looked at Yaqoub." (Qasim, 135) So the figure in the painting is aware of those in the outside world, there is direct communication between them. The world of the natural and the supernatural are starting to coalesce and become indistinguishable. It is at this time, when Yaqoub and the fisherman in the painting are at their closest, that the sharks appear in the painting. The "huge sharks circled the boat many times, and then they disappeared into the far horizon." (Qasim, 135)

The fisherman cannot move his line in the water, and suddenly "the movement inside the painting had frozen." (Qasim, 135) It has frozen into the exact position in which Mustafa first saw the painting: the position that the original oil painting was portraying. Yaqoub's face becomes despondent and he asks Mustafa to leave the room. He does so, and that is the last time he sees the fisherman alive. He is eaten by the sharks a few days later.

The story winds down towards its conclusion in a conventional way. The narrator and Mustafa go to the fisherman's house and see the painting, but all that the narrator sees is "the sea and the sky" and, as Mustafa puts it, "the boat has disappeared, the boat has disappeared." (Qasim, 139) Matters become even more strange when they are being seen out of the house by the dead fisherman's servant for:

> when we saw her closing the door behind us, she was not the same woman we had seen a while ago...he was an old man with a shiny white beard and a white mustache and a white face that looked like paper. (Qasim, 139)

He is the same face as the fisherman in the picture and the old man that Mustafa actually knew. The changing of a female servant to a male fisherman towards the end indicates that the story has reached its climax.

The two men try to explain what has happened, much as the reader tries to figure out the confusing set of circumstances, "I believe that the sharks in the painting took his life, and perhaps the fisherman was not happy to see another person exposing his secrets." (Qasim, 137) But were the fisherman in the painting and in "real" life one and the same all along? Was Yaqoub merely seeing the path that would lead to his own death in the painting, or was the painting innately "evil" in a Faustian sense, leading the men whom it helped to their ultimate destruction? There is of course another explanation: the fisherman in the painting was the ghost of a dead man who came back to revenge himself on the world by leading other fishermen to the same fate.

Unlike many other supernatural and ghost stories Qasim does *not* ever answer the question. He leaves it uncertain and unclear, leaving the reader to decide for him/herself what has actually happened. The answer may be that there is no exact answer, it all depends on the imagination of the reader, much as the painting depended on the men looking at it to come to life. Our relationship with the supernatural, as well as with the natural world, depends on our imagination. It is not a one-way process in which we just receive information or experience, we are constantly in a state of dynamic equilibrium with the world.

This equilibrium might appear to be most positive, for without it a human being is merely a passive receptacle, an almost dead shell that will be filled by whatever it comes across. But the human being of the active imagination that resides in most of Qasim's stories is one that is vulnerable and susceptible to forces that he may seem to initially control but which eventually destroy him. The choice is between a passive life that is unthreatening, but hardly "alive" in any positive sense, and a life in which we are subject and aware of forces that may kill us.

Qasim provides a series of layered steps that lead from our own mundane existence as readers to the supernatural experiences of the protagonist. Thus we have the reader, outside of the story, and then the narrator, who is for the most part merely hearing the story second-hand. He is two realities removed from the actual experience, while the reader is three. Nevertheless, the reader has a link between the actual person that experiences the supernatural and the narrator. In this story it is Mustafa. He is initially cautious and skeptical, but eventually becomes a believer. He

is still one reality removed from the actual experience, but the supernatural world expands its influence to include him directly, as in the moment when he sees the fisherman in the painting look out at Yaqoub. This is a direct experience because Yaqoub is no longer part of our ordinary world, he is totally immersed in the supernatural one.

At a remote distance from the reader, and yet the one most closely associated and effected by the supernatural world is the protagonist. In "The Painting of Wishes" this role is played by Yaqoub. Because we have such distance from him, we may watch his experiences with a kind of scientific fascination, not exactly empathizing with him, but rather observing him from afar. We observe him in the supernatural sea, about to be swamped and led to his destruction, but we are always reminded of our own proximity to his fate by the other characters, the people that point the way from his world to ours: Mustafa and the narrator.

Qasim creates a complex literary structure in his stories, one that is deftly hidden beneath the flow of the narrative. He uses many conventions from other supernatural and ghost stories, while making them entirely his own. So the structuralist point of view, as I have mentioned before, is not entirely appropriate for the study of his stories, if it is for any story, which I sometimes doubt. We must view the author as an individual as well as part of a literary tradition. "The Painting of Wishes" can be seen as part of an overall literary tradition; as we have seen there are many elements that it shares with other stories across the whole genre. For instance, the story of the sea fisherman in *The Arabian Nights* deals with a genie from the sea.

But it also possesses features that are specific to Qasim and actually specific to this particular story.

Much as there are layers of supernatural experience in the story, ranging from the reader through the narrator to Mustafa and onto the two fishermen, so there are levels of analysis that are appropriate for the story. None of them is entirely correct as they depend on a different vantage point. The telescope and the microscope both reveal reality and yet in a very different dimension. "The Painting of Wishes" is both part of a clear literary genre and also a specific work of a unique writer with a unique imagination and experience. It is this duality of form that makes Qasim's stories so interesting and part of what is considered to be true literature.

In "The City of Winds" the sense of the supernatural is in the form of a force of nature, one that is omnipresent and yet mysterious. In "The Painting of Wishes" the supernatural forces come closer to "home" (if home is regarded as the actual human characters rather than a hostile outside environment), but the actual nature of the supernatural element is left uncertain. Is the painting influenced by a ghost, is it a ghost in itself, does it act as a record of something, does it create events and, to a point, fulfil wishes, or is it some combination of all five and perhaps other possible characterizations? Qasim never gives us an answer and implies that no such answer is actually available.

The inscrutability and uncertainty of life is thus exemplified by Qasim within this story. In "The City of Winds" nature was vicious and furious, in "The Painting of Wishes" nature reflects the terrors of human uncertainty, in the last story that we shall

deal with here, "The Deserted Hut", nature is merely a spectator or, perhaps more accurately, a prop to the concentration on human violence that resonates through the story. Qasim moves from outside forces towards the inner horror of human nature. In the process he moves from a generalized kind of "supernatural" story to a traditional kind of "ghost" story that exhibits many classic features of the genre. There is violence, killing, a deserted house, beauty of the seashore, night-time, a full moon, a helpless woman and a repetitive haunting.

As with other Qasim stories there is a narrator and a man who is most closely influenced by the ghosts, but apart from this the concentration is on the classic ghost story. But, as we shall see, Qasim brings a specifically Arabic tone to the traditional story-line of the ghost story. One may be able to forecast what happens next in the story through previous experience of the genre, but occasionally completely original and unique features appear that make the story specific to a particular author and place.

Chapter III

"The Deserted Hut": The Return of the Dead

> Darwish turned to me and asked:
> -"What do they say about *them* [the ghosts]?"
> -"They say that ghosts are merely spirits of people who died in a horrible and unexpected way. Some of the dead people were murdered, some of them had a wall or roof fall on them, some of them fell into a deep well of water and died immediately, and some of them were burned while others were buried alive and so on. People have divided ghosts into two categories: one group of ghosts is evil and harmful, and the other one is friendly and peaceful. The evil ghosts usually remain around the place where the accident happened. They appear from time to time to frighten people. The friendly ghosts live in remote and deserted places so they can avoid contact with people." (Qasim, 171)

In the Western academy relatively little work has been done on different genres of Arabic fiction, but "The Deserted Hut" by Qasim illustrates that one particular genre, that of the Arabic ghost story, is alive and well. In this chapter I will discuss the structure of this story and illustrate how the Arabic version of the ghost story is similar to the more familiar Anglo-American version in some ways while exhibiting its own unique features in others. Similar to other works by Qasim, "The Deserted Hut" deals with a theme that might be titled "the return of the dead." This is a familiar folkloric motif as, "ghost return from dead to reveal murder, and, Ghost returns to demand proper burial ". (See endnote 33) This short story is full of horrific details such as ghosts, supernatural returns and violent death while introducing some unusual elements such as the prevalent abuse of women. It clearly means more than it would appear to do as just a ghost story.

The plot of "The Deserted Hut" is quite simple. The narrator tells the story of his friend who saw an apparent murder in a vacation cottage adjoining his own on the shores of the Gulf. The man sent for the police, but they could find nothing in the house. Indeed, it appeared to be abandoned and derelict. The man is laughed at and he becomes obsessed with what he saw, so obsessed that his wife leaves him, he loses his job and ends up just living in his vacation cottage. It turns out that he sees the same scene of the murder for three nights every four weeks on the full moon. He realizes that it is an appearance of a ghost and digs up the neighboring house to find the bones of the murdered woman. The bones are recovered and the police attempt a criminal investigation. The ghost of the murdered woman no longer appears as her bones have been properly buried.

The ghost story as a genre fits neatly within the structuralist and poststructuralist view of the world. The absent body, or problematic presence of the ghost functions as a screen upon which to project certain significant human fears and hopes. Thus the fear of death, the desire for an afterlife, the concomitant anxieties of both forgetting those we have known and loved and of ourselves being forgotten, the suspicion that certain crimes will remain unsolved and the wish for ultimate justice all suffuse many ghost stories. A figure from the past invades the present, disrupting the linearity of time. The ghost is poised between remembrance and oblivion, asking to what extent one will be ruled by the past and to what extent one can put past events "to rest."

The ghost, the incarnation of death, puts to the living an eternal question. How do we live justly, how do we live with the weight of the past and the fact of death without being ruled by history or paralyzed by the knowledge of our own mortality? Both the ghosts and the people who perceive them may be compared with Poe's "The Man of the Crowd", who is permanently lost and yet reveals the truth of human struggle against that loss at the same time. How do we act ethically in a world in which things, people and events can be lost forever, in which complete knowledge is impossible?

"The Deserted Hut", as we shall see, explores the ways in which we are all confronted by ghosts on an everyday basis through the tangible persistence and intrusion of the past and through the inscrutability of our interpretations of what we experience. Experience, like language, is a slippery medium. What we see may be an illusion and what we remember may be a fantasy. The line between fantasy, illusion, dream and actual sight is often hazy. Most people ignore the subtle terrors of this lack of understanding because constant dwelling upon the unknown of life would lead to a Durkheimian sense of *anomie*, the terrible disjuncture between truth and illusion, the alienation of a mind gone wrong that may eventually lead to suicidal thoughts.[55]

In literature, ghosts have often embodied this sense. They are perhaps particularly conspicious in Shakespeare. The ghosts of Shakespeare may be divided into two classic types, and strangely, the ghost that we shall be dealing with in "The Deserted Hut", seems to be a mixture of the two, so it is useful to discuss them here. First, we have ghosts who haunt the wrongdoer, such as those that come back to haunt

Richard III and Macbeth, the former in the night before his last battle and eventual death, the latter at the night of his usurped power.[56] Then there are those that haunt the innocent: these are the ghosts, as found in *Hamlet,* that seek to tell the truth of their deaths to those who may avenge them. If we view the beginning of *Hamlet,* we can see that the ghost of Hamlet's father reflects much more than the murder of his uncle, but also the fact that "something is rotten in the state of Denmark". As we shall see, the ghost in "The Deserted Hut" echoes not only her own death at the hands of men, but perhaps also the deaths (both literal and psychological) of many women living within a repressive Islamic regime.[57] The ghost is a fulcrum around which many forces revolve, both specific to the man/woman that the ghost once was and also to the general features of the society in which the ghost lived.

Another feature of the Shakespearean ghost that we will find in "The Deserted Hut" is the effect that the ghost has on ordinary people who encounter it. Hamlet and his friends doubt their own sanity when they see the ghost, and Horatio tells Hamlet not to follow the ghost as it may completely destroy his reason. In "The Deserted Hut" both the narrator and the protagonist of the story doubt their sanity. The latter loses all the normal trappings of conventionality and contacts with ordinary life and ends up acting somewhat like a mad homeless person in America. He is stripped of all the features that usually convince us of our sanity. At the beginning of the story, the narrator is the initially distant figure who perhaps stands in for the reader: he is skeptical and merely does not wish to be awoken very early in the morning. Like Hamlet's friends after he hears of the full force of the ghost the narrator does not know

whether quite to believe his friend, but once the ghost appears to him (as in the oath scene in *Hamlet*), he then accepts its reality. If the normally skeptical can believe then who will be immune to the effects of the ghost?

In "The Deserted Hut" an unusual feature is found in the fact that the ghost shows her actual murder using the figures of the men who murdered her. She is apparently able to recreate not only her own form but also those of the others around her at the time of her death. Is this perhaps a spiritual equivalent of a Richard III being haunted by the ghosts of those he has murdered? Are the men who killed the woman already dead and does she have control over their souls through some kind of cosmic order of justice? The men are condemned to repeat the murder over and over again, in a modern Arabic version of "despair and die". Perhaps this is the reason that the police cannot find the murderers: they are already dead.

So some structural elements of the classic Shakespearean ghost may be found in "The Deserted Hut". I am not suggesting that there is some deliberate attempt to mimic or that there is a direct literary allusion, but rather that "The Deserted Hut" is part of an overall literary structure that uses common themes, metaphors, images and structures to create a similar sense. Perhaps, if we are not too skeptical, the common themes of the ghost story reflect a kind of Jungian race memory, or a knowledge of the reality of ghosts that now escapes us in a modern society in which our material needs are luxuriously met but in which our spiritual and imaginative lives are barren. In this context the ghost would once again reflect a wider societal trend than the initial act of

violence that leads to its existence. It is trapped as a symbol of a wide malaise as much as by an instant of horror.

In this chapter I shall combine a humanist, structuralist and close-reading approach to the short story. These may seem to contradict each other, but the method of analysis seeks to reflect the bricoleur technique employed by the author. Authors seldom write with a particular mode of literary criticism in mind, and so no one model can truly fit any one work. There is a clear structure within this story that fits into the classical ghost story genre, yet there are unique elements that make it the work of a particular writer working at a specific time and place. The fact that this is an Arabic short story, and thus uses allusions and imagery that are unfamiliar to the Western reader makes identification of the non-structuralist or idiosyncratic elements easier and more pristine.

As I have already stated, "The Deserted Hut" combines elements of the traditional ghost story with specifically Arabic and twentieth-century concerns. In the traditional ghost story apparently normal mortals are stirred from a state of complacency regarding the world into a heightened awareness of the strangeness of true existence. At the beginning of "The Deserted Hut" the narrator is woken from his sleep by an ever-present but often ignored instrument: the phone. Qasim describes the phone in peculiarly violent and threatening ways. It can "demolish my sleep totally" and he continues by saying that, "its staccato ringing continued like a machine gun destroying the quietness of the house."[58] From being a kind of wrecking ball the phone transforms itself into a lethal weapon. An atmosphere of foreboding is

introduced at the very beginning, foreshadowing in a classic ghost story genre manner the violence to come. An ordinary, functional and mundane instrument of communication is transformed into a threatening and violent figure.

The narrator is also going to be "woken" into a realization of the violence and mystery of the world. (Qasim, 153) The device of the first person narrator is of course constantly used in literature. It enables the reader to empathize with the story-teller and, in the case of the ghost-story, to feel fear when he/she feels fear, to panic when he/she panics. We are going to be woken from a state of self-satisfied torpor into one of awful self-realization by the story. At the same time, somewhat paradoxically, a first person narrative also allows us as readers to keep the described events at a distance: there is always the possibility (the temptation) to consider the narrator to be an unreliable witness.

The phone begins its ringing again and this time is "thundering in my ear". (Qasim, 153) Qasim builds up a series of layers of foreboding associated with the phone and the reader feels that it embodies more than just a "phone". It is the *letter* of the traditional ghost story that so often speaks enigmatically of the unknown. The sense of foreboding continues once the narrator actually answers the phone after the third spell of ringing and hears Darwish, the man who is actually being haunted, tell him that he is in "a horrifying situation". (Qasim, 154) Darwish uses words that cause the narrator, Mahmoud, to feel "the blood had frozen in my arteries." (Qasim, 154) While an apparent cliché, this image fixes "The Deserted Hut" firmly in the tradition of both ghost stories in particular and Gothic fiction in general. There are no half-

measures in these stories, and so the mundane (the telephone) is an instrument of terror, while a frightened phone-call from a friend strikes the narrator with horror, even though there is no obvious danger threatening him. The atmosphere of this place is overwhelmingly threatening. Tension is increased as Darwish will not say what is wrong over the phone: he must see Mahmoud in person. The medium of communication that has already been rendered threatening is not trusted to convey the horror of what he has seen. Darwish falls back on direct human communication in the form of face-to-face contact. As Mahmoud travels towards his friend along "empty streets," he says that "bad thoughts swooped through my imagination like a falcon snatches his prey." (Qasim, 155) Mahmoud and Darwish are alone in the world, alone to face the terror of what is facing them, and "the green traffic lights made way for me one after the other." (Qasim, 155) There is again a foreboding brought forth even in the form of making every light green. It is as if nature is drawing Mahmoud towards his friend with unnatural haste. It is as if he is being drawn into a trap. Once again this is part of the structure of a traditional ghost story: nature conspires against human beings, either through putting obstacles in their way if they are heading along the right path, or through aiding their progress towards frightening truths, as is the case here.

Mahmoud is traveling towards his friend, saying that Darwish has returned from his "private cottage", a residence that turns out to be some kind of mixture of a villa/cottage on the coast. He wonders why he would return so late at night, and then, for no apparent reason, wonders whether "something bad happened to his wife", before realizing that "actually, he didn't mention her before." (Qasim, 155) In these

sections of the story a near stream-of-consciousness technique is employed, as the reader follows the meandering nature of Mahmoud's thoughts.

Mahmoud's sudden thought that maybe something is wrong with Darwish's wife introduces the idea of violence against women. Of course the "innocent, helpless female victim" is an archetype found in much similar fiction, but this time it appears to have a thoroughly modern bent. (Qasim, 157) Mahmoud had apparently advised Darwish not to stay with his wife in the cottage at the weekend because "many young men go out there to have wild parties." (Qasim, 155)

"There" is the coastline, introducing a geographical area that occurs frequently in ghost stories in general. The coastline is an area in which human beings are made very aware of how puny they are. Storms are worse at the coast, and the beach is a kind of no-man's-land between two great powers: the land and the sea. The two of them are constantly fighting each other and neither really gains the upper hand. Man is terribly small in this environment, much as he is terribly ignorant of what happens after death. We are lost in between the darkness that existed before we were born and the potential darkness that will come afterwards. The beach is a physical representation of the thin haven of safety in which we live our lives; thus it is fitting that ghosts should often appear in houses perched over the sea.

But "there" is also a place where the men party, where the old social conventions are breaking down, a place where a married woman apparently cannot be assured of her safety. So the ancient symbol of vulnerability (the house on the edge of the sea) becomes the locus for a very modern sensibility: the breakdown of normal

family structures and the concomitant chaos. Not only women may be in danger but sometimes the young men "harass families who go there to enjoy the beach and have a good time together." (Qasim, 155) Mahmoud's stream of consciousness continues until he can take it no more and decides to deliberately turn off the flow of imagination until he actually knows what happened.

The heightened sense of reality of the story up to this point is one that will continue throughout, and gives the tale a decidedly non-realistic bent. The characters feel too much, too deeply. They live life at such speed and in such a sense of foreboding that few of them would make it beyond middle age before succumbing to a heart attack. But the non-realism provides a greater truth about the human condition: the terror of death and the unknown that we all keep at bay but which may occasionally overwhelm us.

When Mahmoud arrives at Darwish's house it appears that the latter is in fact more frightened than his wife she has not witnessed the same as-of-yet-unnamed event. Here the theme of apparent female vulnerability that masks a hidden strength is revealed. The woman, traditionally the fainter/the screamer, is in fact calmer than her husband. It is a theme that will continue when we actually come to meet the ghost. Eventually Darwish reveals the source of his fear, "Murder was committed last night. I saw it in detail". (Qasim, 156) Mahmoud says that his words "he rolled took me like thunder", a phrase that clearly fits into the blood freezing in his arteries type of diction. (Qasim, 156) It is a deliberate rather than an accidental cliché. The murder that Darwish saw was of a girl, and did indeed involve young men. So Mahmoud's

original fears foreshadowed the reality of the situation but, as the reader eventually discovers, the actual reality is stranger still. As in most ghost stories, "shivers up the back of the neck" and the feeling that we all get that we are being watched at night transforms into a reality. (Qasim, 157) The ghost story is, in a sense, our nightmares brought to life.

For "our" we may imply both individuals living within a society and the nightmares of that society as a whole. Random violence against women haunts the society in a metaphorical sense and in this short story it comes to haunt it literally. Darwish continues with:

> "I saw the girl running away from some thugs, but they caught her and stabbed her every way imaginable: in her stomach, in her neck, in her back and everywhere in her body." (Qasim, 157)

This is not just a murder, it is a total evisceration of her body by a manic group. Here the Arabic ghost story subtly but importantly digresses from the normal model. In the traditional ghost story the ghost is killed by *one* person, and it is in order to find that person that the ghost will haunt others. There is a personalized kind of conflict involved. But in this case the girl is killed by four faceless men. It is as if she represents Woman and they represent Man.[59]

As the story continues it is clear that at this point at least Darwish, his wife and Mahmoud assume that Darwish has seen an actual murder taking place. The girl ran screaming from the cottage, and four men followed her, "surrounded her from every direction as a group of lions surround their prey." (Qasim, 159) The well-placed

cliché within the diction scheme occurs again. We also discover that Darwish's wife did not see the actual killing take place, for she was asleep inside Mahmoud's house while he was enjoying the full moon setting over the sea.

The full moon is a feature that occurs in much of this type of literature, reflecting the fact that such nights are strangely, wonderfully beautiful and yet paradoxically frightening at the same time. Moreover, the "magic" of the full moon merits a folkloric reference to myths and traditional beliefs. The theme of *isolation* also occurs here, because Mahmoud saw the murder happen on his own and when, as he soon recounts, the police can find nothing in the vicinity of the murder except a long-abandoned house, he begins to doubt his own sanity just as quickly as they do. We rely for confirmation of our sense of reality on others, being social animals. If that reality is not shared by others, or is proved to be impossible, then the abyss of insanity may yawn before us. The mad are isolated and, like a small child, do not have the filters for information that adults do. They have no frame of reference to know whether what they are seeing or experiencing is real or imagined. In a similar way the person who sees a ghost is rendered irrational, and this is all the more frightening because beforehand he/she is normally quite ordinary and rational.

At this point in the story both the narrator and the reader have caught up with the story and now we all (Mahmoud, Darwish, his wife, the police and the reader) go on a voyage of exploration to discover the reality of the murder. Once again nature enables the participants to head towards the scene of foreboding with perhaps unnatural haste, "the streets were almost completely devoid of cars and so there was

no reason for the police to use their sirens." (Qasim, 161) They come towards the coastline as the dawn starts to appear, thus bringing them to the scene when the end of night and all its unexpected terrors are going to rule. The houses themselves are fascinating at this point as they:

> appeared to us clearly when the car was climbing a hill on the road and then disappeared when we descended to a low road, and then they appeared again. . . this game of hide-and-seek continued until we reached the armlet of the sea. . . (Qasim, 161)

Buildings are normally associated with stability and nonmutability but these houses appear and disappear like, one might suggest, ghosts in the night. Our sense of reality is based upon our viewpoint, and even objects as large and unmoving as houses can play "hide-and-seek" with us in the right situation. The author provides layers of foreboding in a wonderfully subtle manner throughout the story, echoing perhaps other Gothic-type stories and even that master of the foreboding, Poe.

When they all arrive at the house, the police put on a display of perhaps childish power. The lieutenant has them "dashed with their loud sirens on. . . entered the grounds with their guns in hand." (Qasim, 162) In a practical sense this seems rather odd as, first, it seems unlikely that the men are just waiting around to be caught. And second, if they *were* still there, all this police action would merely advertise their presence and so make the criminals' capture all the more difficult. Of course the writer has put this in the story to parody the typical television police show and also to exhibit the futility of human efforts to understand the unknown. For when they enter

the house, the police find absolutely nothing, as the police chief puts it, "I cannot see any trace of the crime, not even a drop of blood." (Qasim, 163)

This sets Darwish, and through him, the reader, on a voyage of wondering about his own sanity. He "looked to the right and then to the left. . . as if he were assuring himself of the existence of the cottage". (Qasim, 163) The police suggest that Darwish is insane and then we find the poor man in a terrible situation, "The cottage was completely empty except for Darwish, who was revolving inside it like a lunatic searching for his foot stuck in the sand. (Qasim ,163) This simile reveals how a literal translation from an often ignored language can produce gems of understanding. There is no equivalent to this image in English, but it beautifully encapsulates the fate of a man lost in a mire of incomprehension. He is starting to doubt his own eyes, and the experience is terrible. As the police become more and more frustrated, Mahmoud states what the reader must have been thinking for some time, "I think that you were dreaming last night." (Qasim, 167)

Dream or not, the experience totally changes Darwish's life. He loses his job and ends up being divorced by his wife. He is left even more isolated and exposed to the fantasies of the universe. He is stripped of the protections that keep us from the disturbing mystery of the universe. Darwish returns to the cottage on the beach because that is all that he knows. His experience there has come to define him and so he turns into a kind of wild man, letting his beard grow out and failing to feed himself properly. Mahmoud visits him and they sit by the shore. The language is soft and beautiful at this point in its description of the loveliness of the shoreline, as:

> the sun with its soft and red color hugged the sky . . . a group of birds passed us and flew towards the far sky and into the red horizon." (Qasim, 170)

But a hint of foreboding appears as "the sea ribbon which separates the hut from us appears clear and calm." (Qasim, 170) It only "appears" clear and calm, Mahmoud is not sure whether it definitely "is" so. All appears calm on the seashore, but it is inhabited by a man whose life has been largely ruined by a sight that he did not ask to see and that now causes him to doubt his own sanity.

At this point the subject of ghosts is brought up as Darwish asks the simple but profound question, "do you believe in ghosts." (Qasim, 170) When Mahmoud answers in the affirmative, Darwish becomes more contented "as if he had found somebody who shared and sympathized with him." (Qasim, 171) His isolation is a little less complete. Both Mahmoud and the reader empathize a little more with him, and empathy is an essential part of the whole ghost story genre. The characters and the readers may start out alienated but they eventually find a degree of satisfaction in discovering the truth.

Mahmoud, in his lonely isolation, has apparently been doing some hard thinking. He ruminates on the subject of the ghosts and the empty houses saying that:

> the houses are waiting for somebody to live in them because they were built for this reason, not to be empty…their bedrooms are yearning for someone to sleep in them, their kitchens need someone to cook in them, their halls would love someone to walk through them. (Qasim, 172)

So the personification that was hinted at earlier in the story becomes concrete and certain. The houses are, to put it simply, lonely. He says that "the ghosts are proliferating as a result of the increase in crime, the murder and rape of innocent people and that these spirits need somewhere to live" (Qasim, 172) This is the Arabic version of the apparently symbiotic relationship that exists between many ghosts and their houses. The houses need someone to live in them and the ghosts oblige. The ordinary human violence that produces the ghosts is sandwiched and rendered almost insignificant by the houses and the ghosts themselves. The sense is that ordinary human life is only a narrow part of the sum total of existence: a feature common to the whole ghost story genre.

As the conversation between the two friends continues, a situation similar to Wells's great *In the Kingdom of the Blind* appears.[60] The apparently insane man actually knows more about the world than the sane. Darwish breaks the news of his experiences at the shoreline slowly to Mahmoud, a stark contrast to the frightened phone-call with which the story started. He moves slowly, as if he is speaking to a rather slow and vulnerable child. The readers stand with Mahmoud in their ignorance as Darwish tells him that ghosts are not necessarily skeletons that rattle their bones at people. Eventually, once Mahmoud has assured his friend that he does indeed believe in ghosts and that he will not panic if he sees one, Darwish allows the narrator to see the ghost that he has been talking about. I quote at length because it is central to the whole story:

> Suddenly I saw the hut door open slightly and the moonlight shine through, lighting the entrance of the hut's door . . . a human figure

> peeped her head out from the door . . . the head was clearly visible in the light of the moon, I saw long, abundant hair around the figure and almost reaching the ground. I realized it was a very pale girl. She turned her head from side to side as if making sure no-one was on the beach. . She came out of the hut and soared in the air . . . I felt my hair sticking up . . . I felt a sharp shaking inside me that made my entire body shiver . . . the girl was very comely, she had a very shapely body, with a full chest and a thin waist visible through her thin dress...(Qasim, 175)

The description continues and mixes the classic feelings of fear with beauty and of course sexual attraction. The power of Woman that was so subtly introduced when Darwish's wife is not as afraid as he, comes to full fruition in the form of this beautiful and attractive ghost.

The alienation and fixation of the male gaze upon the female body is an essential part of the ghost story genre, linking it clearly to the Gothic sexuality of *Dracula*.[61] Men feed off women, whether it be in the form of adolescent violence or middle-aged obsession with the unknown. The woman returns to the sea, just as all men in a Freudian sense wish to return to the womb before she comes out of it to be murdered once again before the eyes of the startled living men.

The woman is murdered after some kind of party occurs in the house that she apparently takes an active part. What the nature of this party actually is, is not explicitly stated, although the general atmosphere of the description is innately sexual. The men kill the woman perhaps because they can never be entirely her equal in a sexual sense. In Freud, men are haunted by the fact that women can make love to dozens of men in a night while a man is more physically limited.[62] This is part of the

reason why the dance of life, in the form of the sexual dance, so easily becomes the dance of death as they chase her out of the house and stab her to death. The obvious phallic connotations of the stabbing with knives is also stated but never really expanded upon.[63] Arabic canonized literature is perhaps liberated from the need for graphic sexual description by the taboo against such subjects in Arab culture. Still examples of graphic sexuality can be found in *The Arabian Nights*. Limitation is a form of freedom for artistic vision as the author must imply rather than directly state.

The two men see the murdered woman, see the knives cutting into her and then a note of disorientation and uncertainty is introduced into a story that was becoming clear in its coherence and meaning. Mahmoud tells us that:

> ...because of the horrifying murder I witnessed, I released a powerful cry, which made an echo in the desert, and after that I don't remember anything. I opened my eyes only to find Darwish sitting next to me on the bed. I saw the warm beams of the sun streaming through the cottage's windows. (Qasim, 178)

Was it all a dream then? Or was the reality of the situation revealed through a dream? Of course, by this point in the story the reader is well-trained: he/she knows that the difference between reality and fantasy, between dreams and wakefulness, between the past and presents is merely arbitrary and perhaps even illusory.

In a classic piece of literary understatement the author stresses the normality of the morning after when Darwish, obviously happy at having shared his experience, brings tea in bed to Mahmoud! The desperate one at the beginning of the story becomes relaxed at the end, and Mahmoud is left staring at the rocks and the hut,

hoping to find answers there that he will not find in the morning. Darwish reveals to him that the girl appears at every full moon to be murdered once again, thus putting the story directly into the ghost story genre that stresses that ghosts are obsessed with both *place* and *time*. She was probably murdered at the full moon and so must repeat the experience at the full moon.

The fascinating variation on the theme is that Darwish is as obsessed with the murder as the ghost of the dead girl. It is rare for living people to be as possessed as ghosts, but because Qasim has lightened Darwish of the normal mortal concerns of job, wife and family, he allows him to reflect the obsession of the ghost. It is only those who are ready to see the ghost, who are perhaps ready to understand the truth of the universe, who can see the ghost. So Darwish tells of some women who were partying on the beach when the ghost appeared but:

> she walked straight through them without anyone seeing her and the women stayed on the beach even when the dancing reached its height in the hut...when the horrifying murder took place close to them, it was as if they were blind. (Qasim, 181)

So ordinary people, the sane who would regard Darwish in his present situation as a little strange if not outright insane, do not see what is going on around them. It is they who are blind. Again we have the characterization of a shaman-like character who can understand and communicate with the spirit world while others cannot. The socializing and group mentality of a party makes people ignorant and blind or, as in the case of the young men, prone to violence.

Eventually, as in perhaps every classic ghost story in which an unsolved murder is present, the two men search for the truth in the ground during the day, having seen it vanish into thin air at night. They dig in the hut and find the body of the girl, a body that is now reduced to merely bones and hair, and we know that hair and nails continue to grow after someone's death. A woman's hair is perhaps the most cherished sign of her sexuality and so it is fitting that this is the only real reminder of how she was when she was alive. The woman *was* her hair in the eyes of the men, and thus this is all that remains. She is passive and powerless; active and yet powerful: it is a paradox that resonates through the whole ghost genre.

The police, those representatives of the utterly materialistic, solid and supposedly sane society, arrive at the scene and the matter is put to rest. The body is buried in the correct manner and Darwish stays at his vigil for one more night to make sure that the girl's soul is indeed at rest. She does not appear and so all is well. In the traditional ghost story the killers are apprehended, but "The Deserted Hut" ends with the simple assertion that "the police have still not discovered the killers until the moment of this writing." (Qasim, 186) This is a distinct variation on the normal closure that occurs in a ghost story. The killers remain at large and so there may be other people about to be turned into ghosts who will in turn inhabit the lonely houses at the seashore.

"The Deserted Hut" reveals that the classic structure of the ghost story is common across disparate cultures. The ghost occurs because of a violent death and the untimely and improper internment of the body. The ghost is only seen by one

person initially, who naturally doubts his sanity. A close confidant sees the ghost as well and helps to get some practical action going instead of just passive watching. The mortal remains of the ghost are found and the haunting is thus stopped. All ends reasonably well even though there is some sense that the whole process may start again.

Any structure by its nature is bound to reveal variations on the basic theme. Thus in "The Deserted Hut" the shoreline that divides the desert land from the sea is the place for the haunting to occur. Both the sea and the land are foreboding in Arabic literature, unlike the gentle connotations of the land in European culture, and so the characters are left perhaps even more isolated than their European counterparts would be. The ghost is a sexual woman but the sexuality is merely hinted at rather than overtly expressed as it might be in a European ghost story. The murderers are not discovered, thus leaving a disturbing lack of closure that is unusual for the genre.

In these ways "The Deserted Hut" is both a unique creation of a particular author working at a particular place and time, but also part of an overall narrative structure that is common to a whole genre of literature. Normally the humanist notion of the unique artistic creator of a work is divorced from the structuralist sense of the structure being everything, but this story shows that the two may exist paradoxically side-by-side.

"The Deserted Hut" may serve as a useful reminder of the way literature used to be written in the Western/ European tradition before "Ulysses" provided the license to write about any subject-matter in as graphical detail as possible. I am not

suggesting a return to the days when there was a childish ignoring of the facts of life but rather that the technique that Qasim reveals in this story shows that there may be some strength still in the idea that less is more. Because he is constricted by the strictures of the theocratic culture in which he lives, the writer is forced to use carefully constructed metaphors rather than easy-to-write prose.

Within the basically supernatural and thus foreboding plot-line there are elements that seem to disorient the reader deliberately. There are, in places, elements of humor and irony that serve to concentrate the attention of the reader on the apparent absurdity of a situation in which some people are aware of the ghosts and others are completely unaware. Take the point at which the narrator sees the ghost and her re-enactment of the murder. The scene is terrible for the narrator and the protagonist, introducing them to a brand-new world that apparently surrounds us all the time but which we ignore. But the women who are having a party of their own on the beach do not notice the ghost's enactment. In fact the ghost/girl runs through the party when she goes back into the house and then runs through them once again as she is about to be murdered. The live women on the beach not only do not notice the supernatural appearance, they actually continue with their own party while the murder is taking place.

The horror of the situation is exemplified by the apparent indifference of the women. The men (Darwish and Mahoud) who are watching the supernatural occurrence are both more isolated and more traumatized by the seeming uniqueness of their experience. Qasim succeeds in placing disparate experiences next to each other,

and each contrasts and exemplifies the other. [There is, as I have said, a rare humor in this situation that is unusual for the genre.] There is also irony in the very understated manner in which the characters hear about the strange occurrences in "The Deserted Hut". Initially, the narrator hears about the happenings over the phone, and then he goes to the coastline in a car that sweeps him towards the place before any sense of the real meaning of his friend's story has occurred. The contrivances and instruments of modern communication and transport, so effortlessly easy and apparently seamless in their nature, merely add to the distance between the normality of modern life and the extraordinary occurrences in the deserted house. The irony is found in the ease of communication, the ease of transport, combined with the fact that they do not really bring wisdom or knowledge.

The skepticism and outright ignorance of the police, who cannot find any physical evidence of the murder that the protagonist apparently saw and who therefore assume that it cannot have taken place, is humorous. The police are representatives of the purely empirical and scientific viewpoint that dominates the modern thought-making process. If something is not visible, it does not exist, much as if a scientist who cannot measure a phenomenon would assume that it does not exist. The police act as a contrast to the reality of the situation, even laughing at the protagonist when he tells them his strange story and there is no evidence for it.

In a sense, of course, both sides are actually correct. The man did not see a "real" murder take place the night before: he saw a reconstruction of one or perhaps a film-like experience that is repeated over and over again through the projecting

powers of the ghost. He did not experience something "real", at least in the rationalist, empirical sense of the word, but he did experience a different kind of reality. He experienced a sure-reality or hyper-reality that is on top of or beyond our normal reality, but which exists nevertheless.

Throughout the story there are also numerous times in which characters doubt their own or other people's sanity. The protagonist doubts his own sanity, and the police doubt his sanity, while the narrator doubt's his friend's sanity as well as his own when he experiences the ghost for the first time himself. There are layers of sanity and insanity, and it appears that the "sane" world of rationality that we have all built for ourselves is in fact "insane" in so far as it does not reflect the actual state of the world. Our conscious world of material objects, Qasim suggests, is just one rather small and insignificant element of a much larger, although invisible, whole. The incident in which the women carry on with their party, oblivious to the ghost and her own special kind of party, illustrates this vision wonderfully. Qasim suggests that perhaps we are all surrounded by ghosts all the time, but that we have somehow lost the ability (if we ever really had it) to see the truth of the world.

As in the famous story "In the Kingdom of the Blind" by H.G. Wells, Qasim asks what it means to be sane/insane: are we insane, i.e. are those people who see things that "aren't really there" any more insane than us, or do they in fact have an insight into the actual state of things?[64] The insane may talk to trees because the trees are genuinely talking to them. It is we who are deaf, just as in the kingdom of the

blind the people assume that the sighted man from the outside world is insane because he speaks to them of experiences that they had not even dreamt of.

The "ghost" in this sense is a symbol for the unusual, for any experience that cannot be proved by science in an empirical sense. Qasim is thus modernizing the genre, for science dominates the world even more today than it did in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Gothic/supernatural fiction was invented and cultivated. The use of modern instruments (phones, cars) merely exemplifies the fallacious nature of their power. They make people more blind rather than enabling them to see.

The repetition of the murder in an almost filmic sense makes it a kind of supernatural home video that the sensitive person can pick up and watch over and over again at the important time of the month. Normally ghosts are flighty, ephemeral beings whose power lies in the ability to scare rather than in any practical power. But the ghost of the murdered woman, through her very persistence, and through her apparent ability to create the forms of men outside of herself for her rendition of the murder, takes on a more powerful stature. This links "The Deserted Hut" to the twentieth century tradition of supernatural literature, exemplified formerly by men such as Lovecraft and more recently by writers such as Stephen King, in whose writings supernatural phenomena possess a kind of superhuman power and exhibit superhuman abilities.

The monsters/supernatural beings/ghosts of previous centuries were always weakened in some way; they had their "fatal flaw" in a sense, such as the vampire's

strange aversion to garlic and light. But the supernatural phenomena of the twentieth century possess more vitality, they reveal that the truth of the world lies in those regions that we cannot see and, indeed, that those regions are more vital and capable of change than the world we think we live in.

The girl of course contrasts with this vision, as she is apparently doomed to using her power in the same manner over and over again. She replays her murder in a desperate attempt to show that it did indeed occur, as the live men are apparently ignoring the situation. Eventually they find her body, and she disappears. But they do not find her murderers. Once again Qasim adapts the traditional, almost moralistic tale in which the ghost reveals the murderer ("The Tell-Tale Heart" is perhaps a classic example) into one in which the ghost has more limited wishes: she merely wants to be found.

Qasim produces a peculiarly Westernized, almost a-moral world in this story, as in his other tales. People are not punished for wrongdoing; indeed, there is no absolute moral structure set up apart from the obvious, childlike morality that states that murder is wrong. The characters in this story are at the mercy of supernatural forces not through any choice or through some guilty actions, but through a kind of sacred geometry of chance in which one man may be sensitive to seeing a murder (and thus have his life completely changed) while a group of women are completely oblivious to it and thus carry on blissfully unchanged. No *reason* is given for these differences, they simply are.

The fact that *men* are the ones that see the rendition of the murder rather than women may be Qasim's sly but concrete commentary on the misogynist tendencies of his society. He is implying that it is men who should see such things because the women already know they occur: they live through them on a depressingly regular basis. He thoroughly modernizes an ancient genre, while keeping the classic elements of that genre in place. The death of the girl has two main cultural purposes. One, Qasim wrote this during a time of liberal social values within Kuwait, in the 1970s. Compared to surrounding Arabic countries, Kuwaiti women wore more western dress and were influenced by western values of independence and freedom. By having the girl (who dances freely, thus symbolizing her expression of independence) killed, Qasim is commenting on how men abused this new freedom for women. Two, in Arabic culture, a family's honor is tied to a daughter's honor. Qasim does not mention the girl's family, because he is commenting on the double-standard in Arabic culture regarding male and female sexual freedom and sexual relations. To this day, if a girl is raped, she's blamed for dishonoring the family. A comparable example can be found in Qasim's "The Golden Necklace." She brings shame to the family. However, the rapist is not blamed. Often, the girl may be killed in what is known as honor killing, to protect the family name, while the male rapist is not pursued. Hence, in "The Deserted Hut," no murderers are found. Thus, Qasim is commenting on how women are unfairly treated in Arabic culture, especially in terms of serious crimes such as rape and murder.

This ghost story has the genuine passion and subdued violence of early Gothic novels and the ghost story genre before the twentieth century. European writers were similarly constricted at the time and they too produced works which have not been matched in terms of structural logic and metaphoric depth. Death is an unknown that haunts all human beings and, while our methods of dealing with this unpleasant fact vary from culture to culture and time to time, the figure of the ghost rises in all literary traditions, takes on a very similar form and resonates with at least part of our fears and yet also our hopes for a life after the present one.

CONCLUSION

The Kuwaiti Qasim K. Qasim writes Arabic supernatural horror and short stories in order to both entertain readers and make social criticism. Qasim's tales are entertaining, because the reader escapes into the supernatural world, experiencing suspense and horror. Beneath this entertaining surface, Qasim makes deep cultural explorations and criticisms. Hence, Qasim explores not only the fictional fear of the unknown (such as the magical forces of winds, evil spirits, and ghosts), but he also explores serious issues (such as the abuse of nature by man, the belief in superstition, and the exploitation of women). As has been proven, Qasim uses supernatural entertainment in three ways: one, for escapist pleasure; two, to mask his cultural criticism; three, to educate the reader without direct offense.

Qasim's tales are situated within the general framework of supernatural, ghost, and horror stories. Supernatural stories build their narratives around an order of existence beyond the rational and observable world. Ghost stories deal with a disembodied soul of a dead person existing within the living world. Horror stories in general strive to instill fear and suspense in the reader, by exploring the darker facets of the human condition. In world literature, the supernatural story has deep roots, in both verse and prose. Supernatural elements are evident in verse such as *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In prose, supernatural elements appear in a wide variety of works, including European folk/fairy tale collections, but also in the North American literature of Edgar Alan Poe and Henry James. Supernatural elements

within narratives can be traced back to the texts of civilization, such as *Gilgamesh*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*.

Qasim's work stems from a particularly Arabic tradition of supernatural storytelling. Although Qasim is clearly influenced by the western literary tradition of supernatural tales, he is also following the Arabic tradition of supernatural narrative such as those in *The Arabian Nights*. By dealing with serious issues such as women, patriarchy, evil spirits, respecting natural forces, and so on, Qasim, one might say, is a modern Shahrazad, telling tales so as to help heal his culture.

Ultimately, supernatural aspects appeal to the reader's imaginative powers, allowing the reader to escape everyday reality and enter into the story world of magic or terror. Thus, even though the settings and themes of Qasim's stories are Arabic and even though he stems from an Arabic culture exemplified by both Islam (The Quran) and the Arabic tradition (*The Arabian Nights*), he generally follows the western short story style, in the tradition of Poe and Lovecraft.

Furthermore, I have focused on the cultural commentary Qasim is making in his stories, through a close reading of "The City of Winds," "The Painting of Wishes," and "The Deserted Hut." Qasim cleverly uses the old motif of personifying winds in "The City of Winds." In essence, Qasim examines the sense of human alienation from the land that has occurred with urbanization and modernization. In "The Painting of Wishes," the painting represents an abstract force of general societal unease. Here, the old motif of portraits being dangerous and of a picture coming to life is employed. The painting is a vehicle for mixing imagination and reality, signifying a state of

uncertainty in life. While in "The City of Winds," nature was a vindictive force, in "The Painting of Wishes," nature reflects the terrors of human uncertainty. Qasim moves from outside forces towards the inner horrors of human nature. In "The Deserted Hut," Qasim tells us the murder story of a dancing woman killed by four men. The ghost of the woman returns to reveal her murder and to demand a proper burial. In essence, Qasim comments on how women are unfairly treated in Arabic society, especially in terms of serious crimes such as rape and murder.

Also, the multiplicity of factors, such as the personality of the author (Qasim), his origin, subject-matter and meaning result a complex worldview. He criticizes the abuse of modern technology to nature, the belief in superstitions, and the unresolved crimes. Set within a relatively regimented world, Qasim reveals a complexity and a permissiveness of subject-matter. The whole of this study has tried to suggest that there is something "relevant" or "distinct" about Qasim through comparing him to the genre of supernatural/ghost/horror fiction in the Western tradition. The danger of this comparison, while noble in intent, is that the only way a "'foreign" or "other" literature can be taken seriously is through comparison with the Western form.[65] The Western literature is the ideal to which all others must aspire. If we had *not* found common features between Qasim and writers such as Poe and Lovecraft would that have made Qasim any less relevant or worthy of our attention?

The answer is definitely *no*, but it still begs the question of why we should then use the Western canon as a source of comparison at all? It is necessary to mention

Qasim's relationship to western supernatural writers not to justify Qasim, but to articulate a genuine affinity between the western and Arabic supernatural traditions.

In Qasim we have the following narratives. We have a story about a city in the desert made of winds that seek to destroy. The winds are of different sort, of an amazing variety that set the environment apart. The second story involves a painting that seems to come to life. It has mysterious powers either of foretelling the future or of power over what will actually happen in the future. In both stories men die and the story is told by others. In the last story, the ghost of the murdered woman is seen by a man, and the man who sees her has his life ruined by the experience. The ghost is of a murdered woman and eventually the police, with the help of both the man telling the story and the man most involved with the action, find the remains of the woman.

These stories would, then, be interesting in their own right, but far less so than when we compare them with others within the genre. Thus "The City of Winds" is made more interesting when we consider that the wind is both personalized and divided into different types of personality; the wind is given the complexity of a human being. Yes, we have the environment as represented in everything from *Frankenstein* through *The Fall of the House of Usher* and onto modern fiction, but it is never so personalized as to have the *details* of a particular personality. Thus, it is only through comparison with other works of literature that the true excellence and depth of "The City of Winds" becomes obvious.

The image of the Western canon, with its tendency to see itself as a logocentric center of importance and quality and everything else as a second-rate, mediocre *other*

is well-earned, but it should not blind us to the importance of using it as a mirror in which we may see the true details of literature that would otherwise remain remote and, to much of the world, invisible. A similar process can be seen in "The Painting of Wishes".

"The Painting of Wishes" is rendered far more fascinating through considering its tangible or implied intertexual relationship with other stories that deal with paintings, such as *The Picture of Dorian Grey*. The subject of a painting which is not only reflecting an impression of reality, but also a vision of either a moral state or of a prophetic vision, occurs throughout supernatural literature. *The Picture of Dorian Grey* provides a useful lens through which to see Qasim's story. Comparing the story to these makes us aware not only of the features that it shares with the general genre but also of unique aspects. The peculiarly Arabic detail of the man knowing when an exact type of fish will appear, thus making the first co-incidence particularly Arab (in a geographical sense), reveals that the genre will provide as many variations as commonalties.

Finally, in "The Deserted Hut" we have what appears to be a classic ghost story--redolent with almost clichéd features such as the hut at the sea and the apparently hopeless woman, but through understanding these details we notice those aspects of the story that are uniquely Arabic. Thus the fact that most of the cottages are empty much of the time and the effect that the sighting has on the man reflect particular aspects of Arabic culture. This story also reflects a matter of cultural conflict. The freedom of the Arab woman within the secular business world against

the deeply subservient and often trapped position that they experience within a fundamentalist religious culture are exemplified by the woman in the story. She starts by going voluntarily into the hut with the men, frolicking in the sea, and then ends up, being murdered at a party that seemingly goes too far.

The fact that in the repetitive haunting she runs through a group of "respectable" women picnicking on the beach, a group that does not notice the terrible scene unfolding around, is a perfect image of the ambiguous nature of such women within Arab society. The murder of a "loose" woman is often ignored by those who live in respectable society. The subject of violence against women, while no longer taboo in Western society, is virtually unheard-of in Arab countries, so the ignoring of the woman may be an image for this as well. It is thus a dense image, one whose true power we only recognize through a comparison to the ghost story genre in general. It is significant that this woman does not behave as a typical ghost. Instead of being a haunting menace (as is typical in the western tradition), she dances and floats around in a liberating manner. Essentially, this comments on the way women are not free in Arabic/Islamic society, except in death. Hence, in life, women are prisoners in their homes or lacking the social freedom afforded to men. This inequality is profoundly addressed by having a dancing and care-free female ghost.

The "helpless woman" versus the "fallen woman" type of supernatural story has essentially died out in the Western tradition. It became less relevant with the greater equality that women have enjoyed in the twentieth century in Europe and North America. Although the screaming, fainting woman of Gothic fiction has almost

disappeared, however, she is still often present in other popular culture. With Qasim we find its apparent rebirth although we must remember that the archetype has never really died out in Arab culture because women do not hold an equal position in society. Qasim then offers an example of a tradition continued into the present-day: it is modern supernatural fiction that breaks with the genre. But Qasim's version is uniquely relevant to modern Arab societies while applicable to the genre as a whole.

At least within this story Qasim may be seen at the center of the genre, while Western literature has broken with tradition and thus moved to the periphery. For instance, Qasim through "The Deserted Hut" touches on one of the most essential problems in any society, which is violence against women. The problem with structuralism, as we have already discussed, is that it generalizes towards an often Western-type of vision. The Arabic woman may be seen within the image of the European woman, but, as we have illustrated above through the claim that Qasim is actually the center of the genre, it may be the Western woman that is seen in the image of the Arab. The Arabic ghost is the truest to the traditional form.[66]

But the tendency of the Western canon *is* to create a homogenous vision of literature outside of its own purview, to create an "other" that is easily characterized, marginalized and thus ignored. Evaluating the works of Qasim, we may see that this type of excluded writing is hardly of "no value". His works, unknown outside of the Arab world, provide a rich tapestry of meaning.

In this study I have documented the fact that Qasim's supernatural/ ghost/horror stories can be seen as an example of a modern Arabic supernatural /ghost

literature. Taking the Arabic and Islamic traditions into consideration, one can find common themes between Qasim's work and similar types of literature throughout the world. These commonalties include supernatural entities and/or experiences that gradually make themselves known to a single protagonist. In any case, I would also like to mention that the method of approach that I use in the dissertation (building off of Todorov and conducing a close analysis of select stories) is a legitimate means to approach Qasim, for it connects him with the western stylistic tradition, while also articulating his particularly Arabic flavour, (the Arabic literary influence and social commentary).

Qasim's single protagonist tends to have an ordinary, even mundane life at the beginning of the story, but is gradually isolated from this life before being totally changed by the supernatural experiences by the end. He either dies or is greatly, and indelibly, influenced by the happenings in the story. The protagonist has a loyal friend who comes with him part way into the supernatural world, but stays enough in "our" world, for example, the presumably ordinary world of the reader, in order to be able to return completely to it.

The friend either becomes the narrative voice or he relates the story to a third person, the narrator, who is effectively "writing" the story that we are reading. The narrator tends to keep himself nearest to the reader's world and perhaps only hears about the supernatural world until the very end of the story where he may briefly enter it in order to validate the experiences that have already been described.

In this genre there is a great contrast between the natural world and the manmade world, and yet both are somehow threatening. Some stories start with the relating of some unhappy or strange news through a modern medium of communication such as the telephone or the television. The characters use cars to move around quickly, and yet these convenient forms of modern transportation often serve just to first delay and ultimately facilitate the characters' fateful meeting with the supernatural.

The natural world is pervasive as well. The desert is personified as an often malevolent being, either literally, as in "The City of Wind", or more evocatively, as in "The Deserted Hut". The desert reflects the austere nature of the lives of many of the characters: while they live apparently comfortable lives with servants and easy jobs, they are actually surrounded by supernatural forces of which they know very little and which they can control even less. The desert, just outside their air-conditioned homes, offices and cars, is always ready to invade their space. Apparent security exists beside an environment that is tough enough to kill. In the same way, the natural world of reality is always surrounded by a supernatural world that is, in the tone meaning of the word, perhaps "hyperreal". It is too real for the characters to stand, and so they eventually fall into the clutches of the supernatural.

The supernatural beings in Qasim's stories range from the ordinary, and perhaps cliché; to the unique and exotic. Thus in the "The City of Winds" the wind is literally alive, and more than this, there are different forms and categories of "wind-life", perhaps similar to the different types of big cat. All may kill, but they do it in

different ways, and with different needs in mind. A more ordinary type of supernatural being occurs in "The Deserted Hut" with the ghost of the murdered woman. This reflects the Greek "Eidolon". A ghost that appears at the place of the human's murder is perhaps a cliché, but one that has the power to relive and essentially recreate the whole circumstances of her death from party to male murderers is not.

This ghost is also somewhat unusual in that she stages her murder whether anyone is interested in the performance or not. Thus other, live people have a party on the beach while the supernatural reconstruction of the murder is going on, but they apparently are blind or oblivious to the matter. The ghost also carries on her haunting with an apparent lack of care as to whether anyone else is interested or not. The fact that the other people do not notice the haunting is both humorous and yet more horrifying, for it isolates the men who *do* see the ghost from the every day world even more.

In "The Painting of Wishes" the ghost is of a more uncertain nature, indeed, he is never actually fully determined to be a ghost. This puts this story more in the du Maurier type of work than the clearly Poe-like nature of some of Qasim's other tales. We know that the major character is going to die because the whole story is told in a flash-back after we, along with the narrator and the protagonist's friends, hear about the man's death on the television news. The painting itself has clear correlations to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, although it runs somewhat like a film rather than a steadily decomposing life-history of a man's moral decline. The painting also relies upon what might be termed the "psychic" powers of those who are looking at it to gain

its power of change or forecast. As in "The Deserted Hut", the supernatural must rely upon the sensitivity (or susceptibility, which one of the two, Qasim never makes clear) of the characters.

The mysterious nature of the painting is strange in itself. Does it forecast the future or change it? Or does it reveal the unhappy truth that we may forecast our own futures because of the evils of the past? Thus the old man is destined to die because of his own great pride, greed and eventual stupidity. One cannot take on the power of the sea and win, any more than one can take on the power of the wind and win. Nature, whether it be the power of the water or the power of the lack of water will always have its way with human foibles.

There are local (Kuwaiti) and Middle Eastern (Turkish, Iranian, and Indian) folk dimensions that Qasim draws from selectively. The Kuwaiti folk dimension includes local beliefs, superstitions, and characters, such as the ghul, ifreet, and genie. For instance, since Qasim is aware of such local beliefs, he uses them as a resource for his horror. By drawing upon local superstitions and fears, Qasim is able to effectively frighten his audience. As for Middle Eastern folk dimension, there are oral folk tales that circulate amongst the Arab states, Iran, Israel, India and Turkey. These tales are a part of the cultural psyche and so Qasim has another pool from which to draw from. For instance, "The Eagle and the Princess" is a story from India, which is about a huge eagle who kidnaps a princess with intent of marrying her. This is a animal-groom tale, paralleling the western "Beauty and the Beast" to a limited extent. As in "Beauty and the Beast," the eagle captures the princess and eventually marries her. They have

children, but the princess manages to kill the eagle with the help of a good witch. The witch advises her to kill the eagle when he is sleeping with his eyes open. She does this and succeeds, but her children exist as a reminder of her odd relationship with the eagle. Thus, Qasim draws from such a pool of local and Middle Eastern oral folk narratives.

What are the overall meanings of these stories and how do they fit within the genre of the Arabic supernatural/ghost story in general? Compared to *The Thousand and One Nights* they have a more complex overall meaning although there is no overall moral behind the stories. The characters are neither "good" nor "bad", indeed, and perhaps more importantly, no sense of any moral framework, at least within what we would normally term as "moral" is ever set up. Events merely happen because they are meant to happen or because they just do: the characters are not punished for wrongdoing, unless we regard innate curiosity, unasked-for sensitivity to supernatural phenomena or the natural tendency to take advantage of a dream situation as "vice." No, the characters in Qasim's stories inhabit a frighteningly similar world to the one in which most of the developed world presently lives.

Having dispensed with the worry about where the next meal is coming from or whether they will be homeless, the characters are left quite simply with themselves. Playing cards with their friends or getting away from the wife at a luxury seaside cottage, the characters are faced with the truth of a world that they hardly knew existed before the story started. Because they do not need to worry about material

matters, they face the truth beyond themselves, as far away from physical concerns as possible.

Qasim's world reflects an Eliotian "heap of broken images," a world in which absolute meaning is no longer so absolute, in which the certainties of a fundamentalist religious outlook are rendered uncertain within a moral relativism. Qasim's world is not quite the world of *absolute* relativism that we find around us in the Western world, but it is a more interesting one: it is one that is on the borderline between two different states. The ancient versus the modern world, the world of religion versus the world of pleasure and nihilism: each fights and struggles with the other and none of them actually wins. Pyrrhic victories are won, but they are soon reversed.

The characters face the quandary of the specifically Arab world because they face numerous paradoxes and apparent contradictions. They live in a society which has become rich through supplying the West with the energy to run its industry and transportation, but a society situated in a physical environment that can kill if one goes a little way off the road. Thus in "The City of Winds" the man's car takes him to the hell in the desert effortlessly, but it is the speed and ease of transportation that renders his eventual stasis so terrible. The existence of Western ease and apparent control merely exemplify their superficiality and the terror of a hostile environment that is waiting to destroy the unwary human beings.

Their reactions to these worlds are as varied as the actual characters. They stare at the supernatural world and then are influenced by it, but seem little able to influence it in their turn. Each character, depending upon his position in the scale of

proximity to the supernatural that we have spoken of before, is drawn towards that phenomenon with a greater or lesser degree of certainty. Some are left harmed; some are left dead, yet all are changed.

The supernatural forces and the ghosts themselves either vanish when their purpose is done or merely step aside. In "The Painting of Wishes", we never learn of their fate. This may remind us of a Shakespearean comedy in which there is a single matter left unfinished and unspoken, thus providing the scenario for a new set of complications. For example, there is often the sense in Qasim's stories that the supernatural phenomenon has just retreated into invisibility for a while before reappearing again. The reality in which we live is revealed to be an illusion, or perhaps just part of the overall reality that we have somehow lost touch with or which we ignore for the sake of our own sanity.

Adults like to see themselves in control of their environment and their lives. The characters in Qasim's stories are childlike in their view of the world once the supernatural starts to impinge on their ordinarily placid world. We fear the unknown more than anything, and if structuralism is to tell us anything, then the genre of supernatural fiction appeals to this sense of the unknown in all cultures and over virtually all ages in the history of Man. That fear of the unknown of course relates the ultimate unknown and perhaps the greatest fear of all: the fear of death.

Supernatural literature dwells upon that area of existence on which few of us want to dwell for very long: the area between life and death that gives us such an ambiguous sense of our own mortality. The enduring fascination of supernatural

literature is that it dwells upon this moment. It forces us to look and concentrate and dwell upon that which we normally ignore or avoid. The magic, and mystery, of the supernatural genre is that the reader somehow *enjoys* the experience rather than hates it. For the Arabic reader it is the mixture of the religious (the traditional stance of Arabic literature) and the secular (the Western tradition) that combines with it and is somehow resolved within Qasim's work. The ability of literature to provide consolation in the face of uncertainty is perhaps often ignored or at least undermined by many current literary movements with their stress on the nihilistic side of life. Qasim's three dominant themes: the concept of a lost city in the Arabian desert, the theme of a work of art that comes to life with prophetic or perhaps even magical properties, and the theme of a ghost re-enacting a fateful and perhaps even fatal moment in their life, all mix various genres and outlooks to provide a fascinating study of moods that we often ignore.

The reason for this fascination with the normally terrible is that this genre (supernatural) makes at least a little sense of the unknown. It renders the terrible mystery of death at least a little more illuminated through the imagination and thus, through invoking fictional fear, cures it, at least to a certain extent. Qasim lies squarely at the center of this endeavor, and this is why his work is of interest.

Translation of "The City of Winds"

An urgent call to the respectable Kuwaiti authorities.
To whom it may concern.
Subject: request for protection from Air whirlwinds.

I am Abdullah Al-Sheik Mohammed, Kuwaiti national; living in "Deaaya" town, street number 987, and home number 13. I am writing to the security authorities to request suitable protection from strong winds, sand cyclones, and especially air whirlwinds.

I know that many of you will laugh when you read my letter, some of you will even think that I am going crazy when I say that I became a broker to the king of winds. I provide him with a human victim once each month. I am exactly like the one who provided for the Nile River in Ancient Egypt, and the promised date has come for me to provide the victim. But I can say that I absolutely hate to do this kind of job. And, the winds have felt my feelings, because I have noticed that their whirlwinds - in which they carry dirty sand - have begun to show up and startle me every way I go, to remind me of the promise I made before the King of winds.

My neighbors, who live in the same street 987, have witnessed the cyclone, which passed through the country last night, dropping its weapons on my house. It broke my windows, destroyed my bedroom door, and plucked up the bushes that I have cared for all these many years. I think that the cyclone's action was nothing but a reminder, a warning against my being lazy in my assignment in choosing a human victim. I must

present him to the King of winds and the whirlwinds that live under his control in the City of winds. I visited that city under very mysterious circumstances- I will mention the details of the trip later in my story...

After what happened last night I have no doubt that the winds are waiting and lurking for me outside my house to pursue me. I am their target for them. I tell you that last night I was a target for three whirlwinds. They pursued me in the desert side of the "Mishrif" town while I was on my way to visit one of my friends who was building his new house there. I was forced to speed in my car and return to the main highway and then to my house to hide within its walls.

Therefore, I demand that the respective authorities consider my situation and arrange some measures that guarantee my protection. The kind or the type of protection I leave to the authorities to arrange. I might suggest that the authorities should lock me in a basement under the ground so I can live until the situation is clear and the authority in charge finds a solution to this crisis that I have fallen into.

Note: my complete story is attached.

Signature: Abdullah Al-Sheik Mohammed.

This is the letter Abdullah handed to me one night in my house, and he requested that I take it to the police before it was too late. He also asked me to publish this whole story if the winds took his life. Time passed and Abdullah disappeared under mysterious circumstances. After three days his body was found in the desert.

I was a loyal friend to the dead Abdullah. While I was standing with the policemen before his corpse which was sunk to the head in the desert - strong feelings of sadness

and anxiety overwhelmed me at the loss. Here I am, looking at my friend's head emerging from the soil, his eyes open and full of soft sand, his jaws gaping widely: the lower jaw buried with the rest of the body in the sand where the edges of one of his fingers appeared naked from the sand, stripped of human flesh. An investigation was to take place.

The chief of the investigation team approached me and asked questions which I answered. He wrote down the answers. I didn't want to tell him about my talk with the dead man after the first time he returned from what he called "The City of Winds", because I was afraid that people would think that I was crazy, or they would suspect me of wrong-doing. Therefore, I limited my talk to saying that "I did not know about this matter, and I did not believe that anybody - whatever his motivation - would kill this good man, in this brutal way."

The investigation team took some pictures of the head emerging from the soil from many angles. The required measurements of it were taken: some items such as small rocks, pieces of old fabric and other things were taken from and around the body to be sent to the police laboratory and examined there. Some policemen spread out in the area searching for printed traces on the sand. Then, the chief of the investigation team stepped toward some of his men and ordered them to lift the corpse. Other police photographers were ready to take some required pictures. Suddenly, all the people present around the corpse were astounded and shocked by the horrible sight. I screamed loudly from horror and fear, a few policemen ran toward us, while the others turned their backs to the corpse.

The sight of this raised body was extremely weird. To be succinct, from the neck down to the feet, the skin had disappeared completely, and the skeleton was clean of any flesh; the bones had burst and broken the backbone, hipbone, and the femur. All these bones appeared white, clean, and dry. The moment the experts lifted the skeleton up, the leg bones were swinging in the air together.

The entire crowd stood around the corpse terrified and completely paralyzed. After waiting a little while, one of the investigators took out of his pocket a napkin and began drying off the sweat that was coming from his face; then, he broke the silence saying:

-"Oh Lord. What a horrible dead body!"

His friend who was standing near him answered:

-"This corpse is very strange - the head was not touched at all, the eyes, nose, mouth, and the scalp, all these are intact and in place. But, the rest of the body is empty of his blood, flesh, and fat."

He looked at the corpse for a while and continued:

-"I guess we are facing a complex enigma."

One of the investigators came close to me and said to me:

-"Is it true that he disappeared for three days ago?"

I answered him very confidently:

-"Yes, only three days..."

He immediately answered:

-"But it seems - the corpse - has been buried for thirty years.."

I replied to him, after I looked at the corpse as some of the photographers took pictures:

-"Yes.. if we take the lower part of the body into consideration.. But what do you think of the head that seems very fresh?"

The chief of the investigation got out a cigarette, and lit it up and said as he was blowing the smoke in the air:

-"This is really the mysterious thing."

Suddenly I moved toward him after I remembered the letter that the deceased had given to me before he died, and I told him immediately:

-"Sir.. wait a second... I have his hand written letter which he gave me before he disappeared.. I think it contains many things that might interest you."

Then he looked at me and said:

-"Did you read the letter?"

I replied to him without concern: "There is no need for that because he had told me his story and content of that letter."

He asked me very quickly:

-"Okay.. What did he tell you?"

-"He told me about the whirlwinds and the gales and..."

I interrupted myself at once, then I said to him in a half-hearted way:

-"Sir I think you better read the letter yourself."

He looked at me inquisitively and said:

-"The whirlwinds! .. What do you mean?"

He stopped for a while and quickly asked me:

-"Where is the letter?"

-"In my house."

The next day the chief of investigation came to my house. He apologized because he knew who I was and knew my important position in society. He told me that under these circumstances the police suspect everyone and everything until they find the murderer. He also did not hide the fact that I was a suspect, especially as I was the only friend of the deceased. However, after the chief had learned that I own one of the largest corporations in the country and I have a special place among the most influential men and politicians, he crossed off my name from the list. He then asked me about the deceased's letter, and I gave it to him. I asked him if I could get a copy for myself, and he told me that he has no objection to that as long as he has finished examining it.

After a month had gone by since the incident, I visited the chief of the investigation in the police department, and, after he ordered a cup of coffee for me, he begun saying:

-"I have read the story, but, I am not convinced of what it said... and I think your friend had only a creative imagination; that's all."

He lowered his head and asked me:

-"You have told me that you knew the story.. so, what do you think?"

I asked him the same question:

-"What do you think?"

The chief lifted his head and answered me:

-"We have conducted the required procedures, the autopsy, on the corpse… but we could not find any trace of a crime committed… then we went many times to the crime scene where we found the corpse and established a large search area. We searched every yard in this circle, even the sand hills, which were in the middle of this circle, we inspected inch by inch, but all our efforts were in vain. Even now we cannot explain how the deceased came or "was forced to come" to this area. Let us consider that he came to the area in a way which we don't know... and the cause of death could be perhaps... his legs sunk in those soft sands and then his whole body followed them."

The chief took out a cigarette, lit up, and shook his head, indicating his disbelief in the silly theory. Then he continued talking:

-"But, how was the flesh stripped off from the bones in three days, and in such a precise way?"

I answered him:

-"Could it be that the murderer (if there is one, which I doubt)… used some sort of concentrated acid in the process," but before I have finished the investigator quickly interrupted:

-"Do you think this process would escape a police laboratory?… I assure you that the experts examined every possible way to trace any acid, but they did not find anything."

I got up from my seat intending to leave and said:

-"Now, I guess that I am beginning to believe the man's story."

The investigator gave me a strange look, turned his back, and went to search in his desk's drawers. He took out a bunch of papers, gave them to me and said:

-"Anyway... I made a copy of the letter and the attached story. Please take them, I will keep the original for the investigation."

Dear reader, I think that the time has come to read the complete story as the deceased, truthfully narrated it. For the record, I have not paraphrased any words, or changed the weak style, which appeared in the letter. Also, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that there is no doubt that my friend - the deceased Abdullah Al-Sheik Mohammed - was blessed, all his life with such qualities as calmness, confidence, good hearted sincerity in his job, and courage in action... Now here is the story as he wrote it:

I am Abdullah Al-Sheik Mohammed... the son of Al-Sheik Mohammed who was known for his ascetic style and devotion. I grew up with him until I was thirteen. When he passed away, he left me with my mother and four other children. I realized that I was responsible for my beloved mother and brothers and sisters and I decided to do my duty toward my family even at the expense of my happiness. I worked in the beginning as an assistant carpenter until I mastered the vocation and I became a full - fledged carpenter and made drawers, chairs, tables. Years passed by and the owner of the shop where I had worked died, and I managed to buy the shop from his sons. I worked day and night, and I did not think of getting married or traveling even to visit some friends. I gave all my attention to my mother and my brothers and sisters. One

day my mother told me of her yearning to go traveling outside the country. She left with the children and I stayed home alone.

On the night of July the eighth, 1972, only four days after my family left, I left my shop around noon in the middle of a sandstorm. I was heading for home. Because of the storm there were few cars on the road. Moreover, due to the poor visibility, I took the precaution of driving the car very slowly. While I was in this predicament, a person standing by the road caught my attention. He appeared like a ghost in the middle of the driving dust as though he were hanging in the air. He was waiting for a bus or a kind person to give him a ride home. Or so I assumed. When my car approached him, I saw him waving a stick which he was carrying. Since I could barely tolerate the gales even in the shelter of my car, I just couldn't leave this old man standing at the mercy of this accursed dust.

I stopped near him, reached my hand to open the door, and all of the sudden I saw the man's hand pressing the door handle as he opened the door. He leaned one of his hands on his stick, threw himself into the front seat, closed the door and greeted me. I looked at him, waiting for him to tell me where his home was, and he replied that he lived in "Jahra", a village, which is about seventeen kilometers from this spot where I stopped my car. I gave him a discontented look, unhappy with his presumption, especially since he had never gotten my permission to get into my car.

After a little while he started saying:

-"I know that the distance is far away from here... and the weather is terrible... but I will triple your fare."

I answered him uncomfortably:

-"But, I do not work as a taxi driver, sir."

I turned my face back to the front and continued talking in a calm tone hoping to excuse myself.

-"You know that the place you are intending to go is very far away, to you, it is a one way trip... but for me, it is a round trip. It is just that this storm is so severe, otherwise I would not hesitate for one minute to give you a ride to your place... and with no charge."

I stopped talking waiting for him to get out of the car, but he started begging me. Because he was old and also because his health could not tolerate this kind of weather, that he had stayed for long hours on the road, and that his children were waiting for him and there would be many problems at home if he were late. His talk was a mixture of many tones: one time he begged me, at other moments he prayed to the Lord for me, at another one he pressed my hand to have mercy on him. Sometimes he was courteous, but most of the time an insistent tone dominated his begging and his demands. So, I could find no way out but to submit to his request, and we drove in the middle of this sand storm very slowly and cautiously.

On the road, the old man did the talking and I kept silent... He talked about many issues, I didn't want to share my thoughts with him, so I wouldn't let it slip that he was not welcome. I stared at the flying sand around the car's headlights, the lights which only illuminated a few meters ahead... when suddenly, the old man broke my silence with a question that he repeated many times:

-"Where do you think this dust comes from?"

I answered him and I was not pleased with his silly question:

-"From the desert."

The old man laughed at my answer and said:

-"I know it's from the desert… but from which place in the desert do you think?"

I answered him loudly:

-"From every place in the desert."

Again, he laughed at me and said:

-"Do you believe - as I guess - as the new science claims that different atmospheric pressures shake the planet and produce winds and then the winds blow on the desert, for example, and the sand flies up because of this blowing?"

I laughed at his silly talk, and then I said:

-"But, this is not a new science... in fact, it is not a science at all... It's an obvious thing... the air blows and the dust flies, and that is all there is to it."

The old man guffawed loudly then he became silent for a while and said:

-"Do you know what the air is?"

Here I got very angry, I stopped the car at once and I told him to get out immediately. The old man lowered down his head, turned the door's handle, leaned on his stick, and got out of the car without saying a word.

As soon as the door closed, I drove very quickly, but after a short while, I found that the dust moved around my car very intensely and strangely. The houses along the road disappeared, I could not see more then a meter or two, the whirlwind whispered

beneath my car, I couldn't drive on, so I stopped and parked the car and turned off the engine, and stayed inside. I went on thinking of this man who had brought me to this place, I blamed myself for being harsh, especially in circumstances when humans need each other. I would have liked to have returned and gotten him even if he had wanted to go to the end of the world. Now, I felt that I needed somebody to talk with me about the air or any other silly things. I just wanted to talk.

Time was passing by and the dust became much coarser. Its grains crashed at my car windows from every side. My eyelids became heavy, and I felt the power of sleep controlling me. At this moment, I heard a light knocking on the window of my car, I looked at the door, but I could not see anything because of the extreme darkness and the intensity of the dust. I opened the lock and found the old man putting his head inside my car. The dust gushed into the car with his head. I reached to the edge of my keffeih to cover my nose which was almost full of sand, then he said:

-"Can I stay in the car until the weather has calmed a little bit? … I promise you that I will not talk unless you ask me."

I replied too quickly:

-"Sure, Come in please..."

When he took his seat he began coughing very badly, then he turned to me and said,

-"Please forgive me my friend, I know that I am the one to blame for your trouble this night, but whatever happens, this is *your* fate."

I answered him confidently:

-"It's *our* fate, not only mine."

The old man stopped talking, for a few moments he was shaking his head without speaking... then I said to him:

-"Do you want to go with what you were talking about just a few moments ago?"

The old man smiled and responded:

-"You mean the topic of winds?"

He laughed in a soft tone and answered:

-"Yes, the winds, at this hour, are getting very mad and bitter, and the reason is that they have not found their prey until this moment."

I asked him, suspecting something was wrong with his mind:

-"What do you mean their prey?"

-"I will tell you later on."

The old man was silent and then asked me:

-"But, what is your name, man?"

I answered him:

-"Abdullah Al-Sheik Mohammed is my name."

Then he continued:

-"Abdullah, do you know that the winds are creatures like us, they eat, drink, feel, see, hear, give birth and vanish?"

At once, I knew that I was sitting with a person who was completely crazy, and I laughed at him and said:

-"Let this nonsense go, the wind is nothing but high-speed air."

The old man smiled a little and said:

-"Correct, but the air, winds, breeze and such things are organisms like us."

He turned to me and said:

-"I guess you heard of the water vapor which goes up from the oceans, the vapor of tiny pieces of water that lift themselves up and spread out in the atmosphere to drink from the air? And what of those bad smells which you smell, they are sometimes nothing but a group of bacteria which feed on the air, and the zephyr which comes from the flowers nothing but a perfume the air wears… The new science said that the air exists every where: in the water, in the sand, in our body, in the vegetables etc… All the melted air in things is dead, but, the air around the globe is living …It has feelings and a variety of affections... it laughs, cries, plays, and gets mad."

Here I interrupted him saying:

-"Plays! But how does the air play?"

The old man smiled again and said:

-"Yes, he plays. Let my draw your attention to some of these things... Did you ever, especially when you were a child, make a paper plane or sailing boat and put it in a water pond? Did you notice the paper plane move and turn around because the air tickles it, and the sailing boat sail because of the air behind it? Did you throw a balloon in the atmosphere and see it soar and descend and turn right and left by different air streams? Haven't you ever thrown a paper plane in the air to fly for a while and then descend nicely on a current of the air?"

The old man stopped talking for a while, turned to me and asked:

-"Did you see the air dancing?"

-"Air dancing! I have not seen that... As a matter of fact, I have not seen the air itself in my whole life… I feel it but I do not see it."

The old man continued:

-"I believe that you have seen the wind blow to make light things such as neglected papers or birds feathers etc… fly and move themselves around a few times and fall to the ground... Don't say that you have not seen once in a while dust arise in the desert and take a spindle shape until it starts turning around itself in the air from one place to another."

" My friend, this is the dance of the winds."

I laughed at his talk and immediately explained my laughter by saying:

-"You mean air currents or whirlwind?"

-"Yes, whatever you want to name it, but, I know that the air dances."

Here I looked at him and asked with bewilderment:

-"You know!?"

"Yes I know because I saw the winds with my own eyes... I have seen the city of winds."

I noticed that the winds had become calm, the sand grains stopped hitting my car's windows. I turned on the headlights, I could see that most of the road was covered with fine sand. I started the car's engine and I moved on... It was now clear that the old man had fascinated me with his talk, it was as though he was controlling my mind and my imagination. I started to believe what he was saying to me...

After a short while I looked at him and asked him:

-"The city of winds! What do you mean…Is there a city (for) the winds?"

The old man replied with an excited tone:

-"Yes, indeed, the winds have a city… What a great city... I, personally, have seen it and seen its citizens, the youngsters and elders, I also saw its women and their children."

He looked at me and said casually:

-"Well, it is not far from here, Abdullah. It is only a hundred and fifty kilometers in the desert, and if you would like to see it, I am very willing to accompany you to it."

I could not resist the offer. This man had captured my imagination. He and his very strange talk fascinated me. So I decided to go with him to see the city. We headed towards the area which he had indicated. We passed the "Jahara" village, and then we headed west for the "Dibdiba" desert area. We went from the asphalt highway to a little desert road, which was very bumpy and then we went far northwest toward the "Abraq AL Habari" desert. The old man always named the area which we were passing by. I looked at the car clock and it was nearly one fifteen in the morning.

We went along a tortuous desert road. I noticed that the old man was neglecting to name the areas now. I could see the road clearly as the whirlwinds became calm. With my car headlights, I could see some desert plants spread here and there... It seemed to me that the old man was getting very excited to the see the city as the arrival time came closer. He did not stop talking and telling about how the air possesses a great-

armed force that can be used to attack any place in the world. The hurricanes that happen in the world are only one example of its power. He told me that he met the king of whirlwinds once every month, and that one time he had asked the king of whirlwinds for the reason why he is so very harsh on mankind. And, why he gives order to sink ships in the middle of the oceans, destroy houses while people are inside them, pluck trees and.

But here I cut off the old man's talk by asking:

-"Is it true that you met with the king of winds…and what did he really say to you?"

The old man responded quietly:

-"He said that mankind deprived him of many of his air people. He – mankind - did different experiments on them, cut some of them in small pieces, exposed the air to extreme fires, brought them down to freezing temperatures and transformed them into a cold liquid. Mankind used the air people as slaves to facilitate their business by locking some of them in car wheels and air pumps. But most importantly, man. Mankind destroyed his air people with smoke factories and polluted them with the smells of oil and chemical products, disturbed his peace with airplanes and missiles. Many other things the king of winds mentioned."

I immediately asked him:

-"Does the king of winds speak a language like ours?"

The old man laughed and answered me:

-"Yes, but not like the way we speak... He releases various noises that I can somehow understand."

The dawn started sending its fine skein over the heart of the sky, its blueness surrounded the dark which remained on the ground. The beauty of the desert has always fascinated me in this early time of morning, when the sandy hills have appeared with their white heads, and on their surfaces appear the layers of fine sand. I saw some plants with their stems emerged high in the hills... Suddenly I saw a whirlwind loaded with dust climbing into the air and moving around to come close, little by little towards the car. Another whirlwind followed this, one and then three or four, until the atmosphere was full of them hovering like gliders toward us. I imagined them as sand ghosts, at this moment I screamed at the old man saying, "Look! We have arrived at the City of winds!"

I turned towards him to hear him speaking... but the words stopped in my throat when I discovered the seat of the old man was empty. Then I looked at the whirlwinds that were coming toward me. They arrived fast enough to surround the car, I held on to my seat after I made sure that all doors were locked and the windows were rolled up.

The whirlwinds stood swaying and circulating, releasing various noises. They all stood still as if they were waiting for me to get out of the car, but I patiently controlled myself and waited. I saw one of them coming quickly to smash the car, but it broke itself on the hood, throwing its hanging dust onto the car. Another whirlwind came and a third one, but I didn't care about the advances after that. I watched four of them

going to a distant place to meet. It seemed as if they were consulting amongst themselves - a short period of calm passed and then suddenly each one of them began circling vehemently around. Their sounds got high and all of them rushed at the same time toward the car to pour their dust on the car's surface. After the air had become clear and I controlled myself, I remembered that I still had the car keys in my hand and I heard the engine still going. I pressed on the gas pad and the car moved a little and then stopped. I knew that the wheels were sunk in the sand.

The sun sent its silvery, shiny light through the desert. Many attempts had taken place to get me out of the car, and suddenly, I saw on the far horizon some giant whirlwinds hovering intensely and then coming toward me. Now I decided to get out before my car was buried in this black sand; however, I was about to open the door when I saw one of the whirlwinds rushing vehemently toward me. It hit me and threw me on the ground.

At last, the giant whirlwinds closed in, their noise got louder, surrounded me from every side except one. I realized that I had become captive, I got up from the ground and walked toward the open side. I barely walked a few steps when I saw a little whirlwind coming fast towards me and trying to hit me, but the giant whirlwinds intervened between her and me.

I walked for some period of time among small and giant whirlwinds in the middle of wonderfully varying sounds. Once in a while, I saw a small whirlwind hovering and running to walk beside me, covering one of my hands with its circulating dust. I knew that this was one of the whirlwind's children who came to hold my hand.

Then, we walked through a road full of sandy hills. On the surface of each one there was an open big cave, some of the whirlwinds' heads emerged from the cave's gates, others gathered themselves around into circular shapes. They looked like people sitting and partying. At this moment, I remembered the old man and the city that he was talking about. As soon as the small whirlwinds saw me, they rushed in front of me, whistling various sounds. I knew that those were the children of winds who were happy to see me.

All the whirlwinds took me to a big hill, in front of its gate, and inside it, I saw tall whirlwinds standing along the hallway. Their sounds mixed with each other, some of them sharp, high, soft, gentle, each whistle depending on the speed of whirlwind turning around itself. We passed through a large room lit by the sunshine, which came through holes in the ceiling. We ended up in a spacious parlor, there was a giant whirlwind sitting at the far end launching annoying and fearful whistles. It appears to me like a giant ghost. Near it, I saw the old man who had accompanied me in the car sitting victoriously. The moment he saw me coming, he turned to it and said in a happy and proud tone:

-"Sir, this is the prey of this month."

Now, I remembered his words and understood that he was trying all the time to trap me as a prey to the winds, I gave him a look of anger and sorrow that made him say:

-"Don't look at me this way, I am only a broker and servant to the king of winds."

He stopped for a while, then continued saying:

-"All the whirlwinds admire your courage, because all the people I brought here before you came, got here and died from the fear and dread. And here you are standing with courage and strength before the king of winds... He admires you Abdullah."

The old man was coughing very hard, and the king of winds turned around himself many times to create strong wind which make the sands hanging in the air within him, and moved with him. The whooshing reached its highest intensity, and the old man looked at me again and said while feeling very happy and pleased:

-"Look, Abdullah, the king of winds - by his movements - is expressing his feelings towards you - that you are, courageous man."

The old man cut off his talk by coughing, and I looked at him with anger and asked him:

-"But what does he want from me now?"

He responded coldly:

-"He - the king of winds - will decide tomorrow morning."

The old man lowered his head momentarily and continued speaking,

-"Because you are brave as I see - I don't mind telling you what happened to those who came before you to this place. Every human who steps into this land (except me) - will be taken to a high sandy whirlwind situated in the center of the city, and there he will be left in its vortex. Then, all whirlwinds, old and young, start to attack him, each time they tear one piece of his flesh, very tiny pieces only the size of a grain of sand. The process continues until every tiny piece of his flesh is gone, the rest of body - the

bones - will be buried at the top of a hill. If you dig, my friend, in this hill, you will find hundreds of thousands of human skeletons."

I looked at the king of winds, I saw the upper part of him turn fast and hard compared to the rest of the parts which made up his air skeleton, the parts that carry sands. Suddenly it seemed to me that perhaps God wanted to grant me an escape, so I talked to the king of winds, saying, "Sir, let me be your obedient slave... Now, as you see me here before you, I have proved to you my courage and strength. Therefore, I ask you to appoint me your broker instead of this man... Sir, look at his face... He is getting very old to the point that he has to walk with a stick... How many years do you think he will live to provide a service for you? Look at him…how he coughs. His body is getting sick, and he can't even stand."

I stopped talking for a while, then I looked at the top of the king's airframe, raised my right hand to swear and said:

-"Sir, I solemnly swear that I will serve you all my life and much better than this man."

The old man had gone mad, and rushed at me, trying to hurt me. But the king of winds, with one flick of his sandy edge, pushed him away. Then, the king shook himself, and revolved many times in anger. The whirlwinds who were standing by him, loudly came at me and a few took me outside, They then took me, with some other whirlwinds who had gathered around, within a dark sand hill.

I remained in my prison for a period of time, I felt extremely thirsty and I called:

-"Water! Water!" but the two whirlwinds who were guarding the hill gate did not care. Later, I began feeling sleepy and the moment my eyelids started getting heavy and ready to close, a smell of strange perfume woke me up again. I opened my eyes and I saw a gentle and soft whirlwind move around me, its form spread out everywhere, it was full of fine and tender sand. Immediately, I realized that this was a female whirlwind, come to show compassion to me. I asked her for a little water, and the whirlwind went out quickly. I closely examined her: I saw that she turned and circulated in a gentle movement. I saw her look outside my prison very cautiously to find the two guards lying down, their backs against the edge of the hill, both of them circling in a slow and relaxing fashion. Soft whistling sound came from them like snoring, and I saw that they were in a deep sleep.

Only a few minutes had passed when the elegant whirlwind returned pushing a small cloud. The cloud grouped itself and took a shape of water drops, which fell into my mouth. Quickly, the elegant whirlwind returned to where she had come from, before the guards could wake up from their sleep.

The next morning, I saw, through the hill's gate, great movements taking place outside, then the tall whirlwinds came and pushed me gently, and took me to the royal hill. On my way there, I saw the old man, terribly exhausted and surrounded by big whirlwinds which were pushing him very harshly towards the death hill in the middle of the plaza. From far away he yelled at me:

-"The whirls will kill you one day, because you won't be able to provide their monthly victim."

Then he screamed very loudly:

-"The whirls will kill you...! The whirls will kill you...!"

His voice disappeared in the sound of angry whirlwinds. At this moment, I felt that my crisis was over and the king of the winds had accepted my promise which I had sworn before him. After that I heard the old man's death cries invading the sky.

I stood before the king of the winds, he left his seat and pushed me lightly to stand beside him. The rest of the whirlwinds danced in the royal hall. They gave a great dance show, and their dance movements were harmonized and yet captivating. I felt that their sounds were very soft, restful and peaceful. The atmosphere was full of their soft perfumes. The king of the winds moved happily. A long period of time passed as the whirlwinds were dancing. Then, the king of winds moved around, releasing a continuous thick whistle, which made the other whirlwinds slow their motion. The moment the king of winds stopped whistling, all the whirlwinds circled in a relaxed manner. He gave a sign - with one of his edges that carried sand - for the female whirlwinds to get out of the royal hall. He gave another sign, and a group of big whirlwinds took me out of the great hill.

We walked through the city's hills. I saw the death hill positioned high in the middle of the city. On top and around it, I saw many whirlwinds circle, scream, and attack the old man. I could not recognize him because of the sandstorm around him. I was held captive in the hands of the whirlwinds until we were outside the city. We climbed a little hill, and as we reached its peak, I saw my car parked behind it. I lifted my face up toward the sky, in silence, and I thanked God for his mercy and generosity.

That was the last time I saw the city of winds. Now it is about twenty-nine days and I have to provide the required sacrifice. I do not dare to because I would betray my own mankind in providing a human as a sacrifice to the king of winds. Now I only have one day, and the whirlwinds are beginning to appear to me to remind me of the sacrifice's day. I am not hiding it from you. I will not give up nor will I betray my people, even if my life becomes subject to vanishing.

Translation of "The Painting of Wishes"

"Yaqoub Ahmad Ibrahim Alsammak (the Fisherman) has passed away at the age of fifty-seven. A funeral will be held for him at eight o'clock tomorrow morning... We all belong to God and we are all going back to him."

This news was broadcast last Friday evening on Kuwait television after the nine o'clock headline news. We were not paying attention as this news quickly passed by us because we were playing cards at Muhammad Al-Qatari's house in Qadiseeya town. We all said "Lord have mercy on his soul," then we returned to our favorite card game, Kout, except for one of us who wore a saddened face and began staring at the television screen. He then threw down his cards and stopped playing altogether. He moved to sit in the easternmost corner in the dining room. He mumbled, "Lord have mercy on him," and tears started flowing from his eyes. At this point one of us asked him:

- Mustafa, did you know the deceased?

Mustafa signaled yes and then took off his glasses to wipe away his tears using one of the edges of his kaffieh. Mustafa Al-Isa continued sitting at his far-away corner, with his head down, for a long time. We continued to play cards and the three of us lay down close to the television, watching a western movie. In the other corner, some old men were having a conversation about the golden past, when they made their living by diving in the sea to look for pearls. The maid came in with Arabian coffee and gave one cup to each of us. There was a social atmosphere of people talking, the

echoes of coffee cups ringing, the sound of shooting bullets coming from the television, and the noisy sound of the air-conditioner in the dining room, yet Mustafa still sat in his corner, head down and absent-minded, deep in thought. From time to time, I looked at him while I was playing cards. Each time I looked over at him I felt that he needed somebody to sit close to him and sympathize with him about the impact this news had on him. Finally I decided to quit playing and moved to sit beside him. After a short period of silence had passed, I asked him:

- Mustafa, I guess you knew the deceased ... didn't you?

Mustafa nodded and said:

-Yes, Salem, I knew him very well. As a matter of fact, I was at his house just nine days ago. Lord have mercy on him and I hope his soul will be in heaven.

Then he sighed and said:

-The last day I saw him, I felt that he was going to die.

-Was he very sick?

Mustafa replied very quickly:

- No. He was not sick at all -- the evil spirits took his life.

After a short period of time had passed, I burst out:

- Evil spirits?! What are you saying Mustafa? Which evil spirits do you mean?

Mustafa looked a little confused and uncomfortable, and as if he felt that he shouldn't have said anything. He motioned with his hand to me to speak quietly so nobody could overhear us.

A moment of silence passed before Mustafa whispered to me:

- The deceased was a very good person, and he lived a very unique life, full of secrets, and I think that he must have died in a deserted place.

Mustafa stopped talking for a while, and then he continued quickly:

- In any event, I will go soon to get some more news about him.

Mustafa's talk did not sit well with me. He really got my attention when he told me that evil spirits had killed Yaqoub, and that he had lived a life full of secrets and died away from people. Judging by Mustafa's deep regrets, I felt that he was keeping a great secret from me, and I yearned to unravel it. I looked at him and pretended to be indifferent when I asked:

-But how do you know that he died away from people?

Mustafa responded in a very soft voice:

-Well, I said that I think he died away from people, and if you knew his story you would agree with me.

Mustafa's answer seemed to assure me that he was going to fill in the details, so I begged him:

- For God's sake, this is killing me. Please tell me what you know.

Mustafa kept his head up, staring at me from behind his thick glasses. I saw the sadness in his face. His eyes were red, and then he gave me a close look which convinced me that Mustafa really was hiding a great secret . The way he looked at me I thought he was going to reveal the mystery, but he first wanted to assure himself that I would keep secret whatever he revealed. He leaned towards me and whispered in my ear:

-Do you want to know the secret of the deceased, Yaqoub Ahmad Ibrahim Alsammak?

I answered him at once:

- Of course, Mustafa. I'm sitting on pins and needles.

While he continued to stare at me, he whispered again:

-Salem, do you swear to me that you will not tell anyone?

I reproached him quickly:

-You know me very well Mustafa, and we have known each other for ten years, now. If you suspect me of something or feel that I am not trustworthy, I will never ask you again about this matter. At any rate, I offer my condolences to you on the loss of your friend.

I turned up my head towards the television and went to watch the fight between the police and the gangster in the movie. Mustafa came close to me and whispered in my ear again, saying:

- But I cannot tell you anything in this loud and disruptive atmosphere. I will wait for you tomorrow evening and I will tell you the whole story.

Mustafa left after he had said good-bye to everybody. I only stayed a few minutes after him and said my farewells to the rest of the crowd.

Next morning while I was reading the local news section in the newspaper, one news item seized my attention, especially when I read the name of the deceased in its lines. The title of the story was: "Sharks Ravage Citizen."

The news went on to say:

- While fishing at seven-thirty yesterday morning, close to Oha island, some people found a small boat capsized on the water. When they attempted to overturn it, they found a bloody corpse floating beneath the boat. They were shocked as they tried to lift the corpse and found that many pieces of the body were missing. They immediately called in the police from Failaka island, the closest island to the scene. When they finally lifted the corpse from the water, it seems that the legs and one hand were cut off completely. The head and the chest were still intact, while the other arm was entwined around the metal bar running through the middle of the boat. The police had concluded that the victim's boat had flipped, and he was then eaten by the sharks that roam through the waters of the gulf. Inside the boat, the police found an old suitcase, which contained the victim's identification card, stored in a plastic bag and therefore still dry. From this card the police knew his name to be Yaqoub Ibrahim Alsammak, born in 1921.

I threw the newspaper aside, and lifted the telephone to call Mustafa. The moment I heard his voice on the line, I asked him:

-Mustafa, did you read the newspaper this morning?

Mustafa replied in a very quiet and sad voice:

-Yes, in fact I heard the tragic news last night. Poor Yaqoub, he must have suffered horribly with those sharks.

Then Mustafa groaned and said:

- Lord have mercy on him.

Mustafa stopped for a moment and continued:

- Didn't I say to you last night that he died alone?

I asked in a rush:

- Is there a connection between his death and the evil spirits?

Mustafa responded morosely:

- Certainly, the evil spirits did him in, and maybe I am the cause of it.

- Yes ... What did you say? What do you have to do with this, Mustafa?

- Be patient Salem ... and calm down until our meeting tonight at eight o'clock.

That was the end of our telephone conversation.

At eight o'clock that evening, I was standing before the door to Mustafa's house. Mustafa came out in his striped night cloth and asked me to come in. We settled in the living room and talked about many things.

- Salem, in fact, I do not know where I should begin, because I don't know where the end is. However, I will not keep anything from you, no matter how small, as much as I can. I heard these things from the deceased, and in fact I saw such strange things with my own eyes that nobody would believe. And if I had not witnessed these fantastic things myself, I would say that they were just the product of a wild imagination, but...

He stopped talking when the maid came in. Mustafa asked her to make us two cups of coffee, and then asked me:

- Salem, did you ever meet the deceased?

I shook my head negatively.

- Yes, I think you have seen him; let me remind you.

Mustafa took off his thick glasses and began to rub one of his eyes. Then he addressed me while still scratching that eye:

- Let's go back in time, or to be more precise, to the fifties. Do you remember the man who sold fish at the right-hand corner of the fruits and vegetables market? In the same spot where the tea cantina is located now?

Mustafa put his glasses back on and looked at me. When he saw that I was confused, he shrugged it off and said:

- I think you have forgotten. Never mind, I don't really blame you, because the deceased stayed at that spot for only a few years. As soon as he saved enough money, he sold the place to the current owner of the cantina. He bought himself a small boat, and went to practice his favorite hobby on the sea. He always came to the market to sell whatever he caught from the ocean. He continued fishing for a long time, until he become addicted to it.

Mustafa stopped for a while, trying to remember something, then he continued:

- I met Yaqoub Alsamak one day in the early seventies while he was trying to unhook his boat trailer from his car. I took pity on him because he was old, and so I went to help him. After a lot of hard work we were finally able to disconnect the trailer from the car. We pushed the boat onto the water, where I stayed holding the floating boat, while Yaqoub drove the jeep and the trailer away from the lot that was a designated area for boats. A few minutes passed before Yaqoub returned to thank me for helping him. He looked at me sharply and said in a weak voice:

-I hope I can see you when I come back in the evening. Today I will catch fourteen Nagrour fish and I will give you seven of them.

I smiled at Mustafa's tale. Mustafa knew what I was thinking, and he reproached me and said:

- Salem, don't laugh! This was the number that Yaqoub told to me. Fourteen Nagrour fish.

I immediately interrupted him:

-But, how did he know that he would catch this exact number? How did he know that he would catch anything at all?

The maid came with the coffee. Mustafa took the plate and gave me one of the cups, and lifted the other and took a long sip before continuing:

- Please Salem, do not interrupt my story.

Mustafa stopped talking for a while and then said:

- I was surprised at the exact number, too, but I was really annoyed that Yaqoub mentioned this kind of fish -- Nagrour -- because it was not the season for it. I watched Yaqoub when he put both his hands on the boat and jumped in, making the boat rock back and forth. Yaqoub turned the boat, started the engine, and looked at me to assure me:

-Fourteen Nagrour fish. Seven of them for you.

He waved at me and left. And, I just kept looking at him going farther and farther into the water. I saw the water fan out on each side of the boat. I watched the boat

until it was no more than a black dot surrounded by beautiful white flying water. A few minutes passed and the boat had disappeared in this wild and huge sea.

Mustafa took another sip of coffee and said:

- I decided to return that evening, not because I needed these seven fish, but I wanted to see if Yaqoub actually caught the same number that he had told me. So, at four o'clock in the afternoon, I drove my car to the seashore, where I saw many boats returning. I felt happy when I saw Yaqoub's car parked there. I realized that he was still on the water. I sat down on the fine sand next to the asphalt driveway. I saw many people happily carrying their fish baskets. Some of them were carrying small baskets full of little fish, others were hiding their baskets inside their boats because they were full of big fish. They were probably afraid of the evil eye. I also saw some of them relaxing in the water after spending many hours on the sea. A curious group came to the boats and started looking inside. They smiled self-righteously when they found empty fish baskets. One of them slipped and fell to the ground, but immediately jumped up again, although not before many people had seen him and started to laugh. I saw Yaqoub's boat coming to the shore from a distance. The moment he arrived, I went over to hold his boat. I was shocked when I saw the basket. He had caught the Nagrour fish even though they were out of season!! A curious person looked at the basket from far away and shouted:

- LOOK! The Nagrour season has begun.

A crowd of people came and surrounded the boat, many of them in a state altering between belief and disbelief. The crowd examined the fish, while Yaqoub kept

smiling to some admirers and even at those in the crowd who were envious. He looked at me with a big smile. I saw that his white mustache gave a kind of beauty to his smile and sun burnt face. He took off his kaffieh and wiped his face, while pointing to the basket and saying:

- Count them, man. Fourteen Nagrour.

I believed him immediately, without counting them.

We went to pull the boat up from the water and reconnect it to the car. While he was preparing to leave, Yaqoub handed me the seven best fish as a gift. I hesitated to take them, and told him that I had not come to have the fish, but to confirm what he had told me. As he was about to leave, I asked him:

-And how many are you going to catch tomorrow?

He looked at me with a smile and said:

-I will tell you about that tomorrow.

Mustafa finished the last sip of his coffee, lit a cigarette, and continued his story under a canopy of smoke.

-This was my first meeting with Yaqoub Alsamak.

Here I interrupted him to speculate:

-But maybe it wasn't such a strange thing. He might have run into an area that is full of this kind of fish.

Mustafa laughed and said:

- Look Salem. You don't know about fish and their nature. Nagrour only like Newaibi and Zebaidi, they migrate from one place to the other. You can only see

them twice a year, in the fourth and ninth months. The female Nagrour arrive in the gulf and spread their eggs in the easternmost muddy area. The eggs hatch after a few days, and new little Nagrour fish go out and live deep in the water and under the stones on the ocean floor. They stay there for three months until they get bigger. Then the fishermen come and catch them. After three months the Nagrour migrate again far away, only God knows where. If you searched the whole sea, you would not be able to find any trace of them, except maybe a few who were left behind.

I did not want Mustafa to continue to talk about the nature of fish, because I knew he would go on and on about the subject and I would have a tough time getting him back to the main topic, so I jumped in and said:

- Let's not talk about the nature and migration patterns of fish. I'd rather you continued your story about the deceased.

I felt that Mustafa had lost patience with me, so I promised him that I would just listen for the rest of the story. He continued:

- The next morning I returned to the beach and I found Yaqoub already waiting for me. Actually, he was in his boat when I arrived. He was starting the engine when he saw me coming. He waved at me, so I approached him at the water's edge. I heard him call out in a soft voice:

- Twenty-seven Nagrour fish.

- Twenty-seven Nagrour fish?!

I said this in a voice mixed with both happiness and admiration.

Yaqoub smiled, started the engine and waved good-bye, then he raced off in his boat towards the distant horizon.

The ash of his cigarette was getting long, so Mustafa flicked it into the ashtray. Then he carried on with his story in a very passionate voice:

- Salem, I really don't know why I became attached to that good man. The moment he left, I already missed his fatherly face. Indeed, I felt like a son towards his father. The same feeling anybody who has lost his real father and finds someone older than him with a dignified character. So I felt as if my father had just left me to go off and catch fish. I returned home with this kind of sensation.

I had plenty of time before the other fisherman arrived at the beach. To kill time, I made myself busy with some work at home. The moment I finished one task, I would go on to another. I kept doing that until four o'clock in the afternoon, when I drove out to the beach. I did not wait long before I saw Yaqoub approaching the beach. The minute he saw me, he waved both hands, as if he were congratulating himself. Above the murmur of the water behind the boat and the wheezing sound of the boat engine, I heard Yaqoub calling:

- Twenty-seven! Twenty-seven!

Exactly like the previous day, many fishermen came over to the boat. I counted every fish in the vessel. Indeed, it was precisely twenty-seven!

Days passed, and I saw Yaqoub each day before he left for fishing and after he returned. He told me the number of fish he would catch, and he was right every time.

Mustafa took off his glasses, took out a napkin from his pocket and started to clean his glasses very harshly, until I heard a creaking like the sound of winds. Then he continued his story:

- One day while I was sitting at the beach, I saw Yaqoub coming out of his car, wearing clean clothes. He looked as if he were not planning to fish. He came close to me while he was looking at the sea, then he sat beside me, and I began the conversation:

- Yaqoub, I see that you are taking a vacation today! Have you given up fishing?

Yaqoub smiled and said:

- No, but the wind will blow soon, the weather will change and the sea will become rough.

I looked at him strangely and then I looked out over the sea. I could see that the ocean was calm and the reflection of the sun beautifully lit up the atmosphere. I saw some boats lying on the fine sand. Again, as I looked at the sky I saw its blueness giving assurance of itself, and I did not notice any indication of a change in the weather, not for many days to come. The forecast on the radio that morning indicated that the weather would be calm and fine. Yaqoub's statement was completely unexpected. I feigned unconcern as I asked him:

- Do you really think so?

Yaqoub smiled like always and answered:

- I know what I'm talking about. Wait and see for yourself. Mustafa, the winds will blow very strongly, and the fishermen will return in a few minutes one after the other.

Mustafa put his glasses back on, adjusted them to align them properly around his ears and said:

-Yaqoub made me confused. I wanted, first and foremost, to ask him about the number of fish that he caught every day, but this day he surprised me with his prediction of the force of the wind. Before asking too much, I thought that I should wait to see what would happen this time. Meanwhile, a boy had interrupted my thinking. He came to the beach, took out his fishing string from a little bag he carried, inserted a bait and then he threw his string far into the sea. The boy kept at it, hoping to catch something. Once, he caught a small fish, while another times he did not catch anything at all.

-A warm breath of air blew and continued for a stretch of time. It whipped the calm surface of the sea. A series of small whitecaps of water began appearing on the sea, which made some of the boats dance from side to side. A light wind had followed the breath of air. The waves on the water became bigger, and the waves rushed towards the shore. The wind became stronger after a while, and soon the waves were crushing each other in the heart of the sea. The white tongues of the waves appeared to rise and then disappeared back into the water. The wind became so intense that it made the waves rise dramatically, and they crashed the floundering boats and then broke over the gunwales with their white foam. The dust was swirling on the far

horizon, and the creaking of the wind became stronger, and the sand from the beach flew up and pelted our faces and clothes. We could see boats in the distance struggling with the huge waves, trying desperately to reach shore. The sky was filled with dirt and sand. In less than an hour, the calm sea had been transformed into a maelstrom of huge waves colliding with each other, and the clear blue sky had disappeared behind a curtain of fine dust. A gigantic wave crawled like a python coming speedily towards the shore, swallowing the small waves in its path, and then hurled itself down on the beach. The little boy pulled his strings out of the water, folded them and put them in his small bag, and then fled away. Mustafa looked at me and asked me:

- Salem, do you want another cup of coffee?

I shook my head negatively, then said:

- I do not want anything but for you to continue your tale. Mustafa, what are you saying is indeed fascinating.

Mustafa took out a cigarette, lit it, blew the smoke in the air and said:

- What Yaqoub had said was right. I felt in that stormy weather that I was before an extraordinary and unusual man. I insisted that he tell me what he knew. At first he refused to tell me, but finally he relented, but only after I begged him in the name of brotherhood and promised him that I would not tell anybody his secret. He could not resist my insistence. He looked at me, and then he grinned and told me:

- If you are that desperate, I am ready to reveal the secret to you. Do not forget your promise that you will not tell anybody, at least in my lifetime. If I die, you are

free to tell whomever you want. Yaqoub asked me to visit him at his house. He described the location of his home, and we parted in the very stormy weather.

The winds continued storming for two days, and as a result of that, the dust had accumulated in houses, and the shipping traffic in the sea was stalled. Also the traffic in the city was reduced, especially in the evening, because the streetlights disappeared in the flying dust. The next day, the winds became less strong and the dust had almost disappeared from the air. The following day the sun shone and the sky was clear. Most people were busy cleaning their houses. But I went straight out to visit Yaqoub. He had given me good directions, and so I did not have a hard time finding it. The house was old and covered on the outside with cement. There were many cracks in the outside walls, revealing the sea stones that made the wall. On the top of the house, there were oak beams used to expand the inside of the house and make ceilings for the rooms. You could see from the outside that one of the windows was made like a hole. I saw Yaqoub sitting inside this room. He got up when he saw me standing outside, and quickly opened the door for me.

Mustafa became silent. When he looked at his watch he remembered that he had made a light dinner. At once, he went to the kitchen and called back to me saying:

- Dinner is ready, Salem.

I was reluctant at first, and then I walked to the kitchen where I saw a table full of different kinds of food.

- Please sit here and I will continue the story while we eat our supper.

When I took my seat, Mustafa continued where he had left off:

- Yaqoub welcomed me into his house and took me to the room overlooking the street, then he went to fetch some tea. I noticed the simplicity of Yaqoub's lifestyle. The room had an old Persian rug, there was an old box in one corner, and a big tire with a mirror that reflected the few pictures hanging on the walls. And there was a fan to make the room a little cooler. After a short while, Yaqoub came back with the tea.

He told me about his life. He had started diving with his father in search of pearls, and then he ended up selling fish. He was married when he was sixteen, but his wife died after thirty years of marriage. She gave birth to one daughter, but who died six months after her birth. Because he was in love with his wife, he decided not to get married again.

Mustafa drank a whole glass of water then he said casually:

-Yaqoub told me about many other things. I do not find them relevant to our topic.

I thanked God for that, because Mustafa always moves to other details, which are not important. I stopped eating and asked him:

- What did he tell in addition to his life story?

Mustafa answered after he took a bite of a biscuit filled with beef:

- Yaqoub stopped at that. But then he reminded me of the promise I had made to him. Then he asked me to join him in the other room. As I walked towards the room, I noticed its heavy metal lock. He took out a chain full of keys from his pocket, and selected one which was bigger than the rest of the keys, and seemed to resemble the gray lock itself. After a brief moment, he entered the room and I followed him in. The first thing I noticed was the smell of the sea that dominated the room.

I quickly interrupted Mustafa's talk:

- A sea smell? What do you mean?

He answered:

- I mean the breezes of the sea, Salem. Inside the room, I imagined I could hear the snarling of waves, or the crowing of sea gulls coming from far away. In the midst of that, I heard a strange voice, yes, something like that. Something like a human who was whimpering from sadness or a fisherman singing a mournful song. But as I said, it was coming from far away. Then suddenly, the voices stopped. Yaqoub had noticed my reaction, but he didn't say anything. He motioned me towards a painting hanging on the wall. He told me that this painting was like a crystal ball which predicted the state of the sea.

The painting was extremely beautiful and evocative. The oily color gave it a unique tone. The painting depicted a man sitting in his boat in the middle of the sea. He was holding a fine string which extended to the deep bottom of the sea. The man appeared to be looking at the water with his head down. He looked as if he were staring at one tiny spot in the water, where the water and the string met. His head was covered with a white kaffieh. As I stared at him, I imagined there was a big fish deep in the water trying to snap up the bait, while the man was excited about catching it. I saw that a crystal-clear sky covered the blue, clear sea, and the painting was framed with ornate gold.

This beautiful and evocative painting pulled me in towards it. So I approached it, and I wanted to touch it, but before my hand could brush it, Yaqoub pushed me aside

while holding my hand tightly and pulling it away. I was surprised by Yaqoub's action. I gave him a startled look, but he immediately apologized to me. He asked me to have a seat so he could tell me his history with this painting. He told me that one day while he was fishing, he saw it floating on the water. He took it home with him since it represented his favorite hobby. At first, he hung it in the room overlooking the street. Since he was always in that room, the painting became a part of him, and he loved it dearly.

Mustafa felt sleepy; he looked over at me and asked:

- Salem, have you finished eating?

I answered quickly in the affirmative, yearning to hear the remainder of his story:

- Yes, my thanks to God. But I can see you are exhausted, so can I ask you to speed up your story?

He answered with annoyance:

- Salem, you ask the impossible. I cannot summarize the rest of the story, because it is one that will transport you from this world to the realm of the weird and the fantastic.

Mustafa stood up from his chair and said:

- Let's go to the living room so we can drink coffee and continue to talk.

I went with him, where he called for the maid and asked her to make us some coffee. After we sat on the comfortable sofa, he said:

- I was saying ... saying. Ah yes, I remembered that Yaqoub loved that painting to the point that he worshipped it. He stared at it day and night. He hoped

that he could see through the obscure waters of that deep sea and that big fish which was trying to snap the bait of the fisherman on his boat. He was disappointed. But he told me that while he was staring at this painting, he could smell the sea breezes. He could also hear strange voices coming from faraway. Voices that were mixed with the strong whistling of the winds, sea birds, and the depressed song of a fisherman, like the one I heard, Salem. He told me that these voices became very close to him, and started to become louder and louder, until he couldn't bear them.

- Then the voices stopped and silence returned to the room. Yaqoub said that in the middle of that, he noticed a little shaking of the string in the painting, and that the fisherman had moved from his place, and seemed to have changed his sitting position. Then the fisherman pulled up the string little by little. The movement of the fisherman in the painting was followed by the rocking of the boat from side to side. The water also began to move, and real life flowed and melted into the painting. It was not long before the fisherman pulled out a big Nagrour fish, and Yaqoub told me …

Here I interrupted Mustafa's tale in shock and surprise. I asked him sarcastically:

- Wait a little, Mustafa. Let me make sure about what I just heard. You said that the fisherman inside the painting moved from his place, and pulled up on the string until he landed a big fish? I also heard you saying that the water beneath the boat was moving? Did all that happen in the painting?

Mustafa nodded his head affirmatively as he answered me:

- Salem, everything you heard was right. That's exactly what Yaqoub told me during our first meeting.

I asked Mustafa to continue his story. He smiled and shook his head in disbelief. I let him think to himself, "What a weird world, and how many secrets it hides." Then he continued:

- I was really in shock while I was hearing Yaqoub tell his story about the painting. Admittedly the painting was impressive, but I didn't see any indication of life in it. I was very confused right from the beginning, and I felt that I was sitting with a lunatic. Then Yaqoub told me that the man in the painting caught ten big fish. After that, all signs of life in the painting became still, and Yaqoub wished to himself that he could catch the same number of fish.

The following day, Yaqoub went out fishing, far away from the shore. He spotted a person swimming in the middle of the ocean and waving. That man was waving at Yaqoub. Yaqoub, at first, thought that this person was drowning and needed help. When Yaqoub approached him and got close enough to see him, he was astonished. He could not believe his eyes. The drowning man was the same man as in the painting. The man continued to swim, and Yaqoub followed him, until he dived deep into the water. Yaqoub stopped his boat in the same place where the man had disappeared. Yaqoub waited for a long time, in case the man would reappear. But he did not come back up. Yaqoub felt exhausted and afraid. He sat there thinking. After a little while, Yaqoub snapped to and thought that he must have been hallucinating. But he pulled out a fishing string and inserted some bait on it and threw it into the water. The moment the string touched the water, Yaqoub felt a strong shaking in the string. He could feel a big fish trying to eat the bait. When he pulled out the string, he found a

big Nagrour fish hooked on the end of the line. He was ecstatic, and threw the line into the water again. Yaqoub continued throwing the string and every time he pulled out a big Nagrour fish, until he had caught ten fish, all of the same kind. After that, he stayed in the same spot for a long time, trying to catch more fish by using different kinds of baits, but all of his attempts ended in failure. But Yaqoub returned home - happy, and sold his fish at a very profitable rate.

Mustafa took off his glasses, blew on the lens with a hot breath, and went on to wipe it using a clean napkin. When he had inspected the lens and found them clean, he put his glasses back on and continued talking:

-Yaqoub also told me that in the evening of the same day, while he was again staring at the painting, the life inside the painting began to flow again and the man in the painting started to pull out fish one after the other until suddenly there were no more signs of life inside the picture. Yaqoub wished that he could catch the same number, and he was not disappointed. When he returned the following day to the sea, he saw the ghostly man swimming in the middle of the sea again. Yaqoub followed him until the man from the picture disappeared deep into the water. Yaqoub threw his string and caught the same number he had wished for the previous day.

Mustafa stopped talking for a while and then he continued:

- Salem, I want to make the story short. Yaqoub also told me that he continued to talk to "The Painting of Wishes" every day. And each time he went fishing, he would catch the same number of fish he saw in the painting.

The maid came with more coffee, and Mustafa lit up a cigarette and continued his story:

- Yaqoub had also told me that one evening in the dead of winter, while he was sitting in the room staring at the painting, he saw the waves violently crashing into each other. He also saw the boat was struggling to stay upright in the middle of huge waves. The sky was full of ominous black clouds, and lightening was striking with heavy rains inside the picture. Then the movements within the painting stopped. The next day, Yaqoub experienced the same weather he had seen in the painting, and that's when he decided to move the painting to another room, because he was afraid that somebody might see it and steal it.

Here, I laughed at Mustafa's tale and said:

- I think Yaqoub was playing with your mind. Do you want to believe that a normal oil painting can become like a television screen, where things move around, such as clouds and water? It sounds almost like a weather forecasting channel.

Mustafa interrupted me with the assurance:

- I agree with you, Salem. The painting does become a weather prediction machine.

Mustafa stopped talking for a while, before he looked at me with reproach and said:

- Salem, don't be sarcastic, and wait until I finish the whole story.

He finished smoking his cigarette and added:

- At any event, when Yaqoub finished telling me his story, I requested that he show me how the painting worked. He was hesitant at first, but he was afraid that I would

accuse him of lying and making things up. Immediately, he jumped to his feet and locked the door. Then he sat close to the painting and started to stare at it intently. I also did the same.

The room became extremely quiet, time passed very slowly, and still Yaqoub sat stiffly before the painting. I saw his hands shaking, then his head and the rest of his body. After some length of time, Yaqoub's whole body was shaking.

I felt scared and began to sweat, especially on my face, and my glasses slipped down and sat on the end of my nose. Yaqoub was still shaking, and I had difficulty breathing, as if the air in the room had disappeared. Suddenly, I felt the lovely sea breeze and from far away came some voices like the snarling waves, sea birds, and then the sad song. The voices became louder and louder until they abruptly stopped. The room became very quiet. I woke up when the voices stopped and I saw Yaqoub's shaking had also ceased. I looked at the painting and I saw that the fisherman in was really moving from his place. The fisherman lifted his head up and looked at Yaqoub, and it was obvious from his face that he was angry. Then he looked at me and smiled. Everything in his face was clear. I saw the shiny white beard that covered his face, and his moustache that hung down to his lips. His face was nice and white like paper.

The string in the hands of the fisherman was shaking. The water moved around the boat, and I saw some small fish coming from the right corner of the painting's frame swimming toward the left side of the frame, then they disappeared from sight. I also saw some huge sharks making many circles around the boat, before they, too, disappeared on the far horizon. The light breath, inside the painting, passed over to

tickle the surface of the water and the clothes of the fisherman. After that, the movement in the painting froze.

Yaqoub mumbled some ambiguous words. I saw his face had changed and he became despondent. He would not talk after that and asked me to leave immediately. I said good-bye to Yaqoub and left him.

I left the room with a feeling of confusion and amazement, as if I had imagined seeing a movie or had sat in a bizarre place where weird people tried to communicate with evil spirits. I returned home in a state of disbelief.

Mustafa stopped talking, then he said with a sad tone:

- This happened nine days ago, and Yaqoub has now left this world.

Mustafa stopped at this point and a moment of silence passed before I asked him calmly:

- Did you go to the beach again after that?

- No Salem, after I discovered that the deceased was dealing with evil spirits, I decided to stay away from him. Also, I did not go to the cemetery to attend his funeral for fear that I would see his ghost.

I shook my head in sympathy and said:

- I believe that the sharks in the painting took his life. And perhaps the fisherman in the painting was not happy to see another person exposed to his secrets.

Mustafa responded to me with some fear:

- I agree with you Salem, and I blame myself for that.

Then he continued:

- I insisted that Yaqoub tell me about his secret. I wish now that I had not asked.

Suddenly, I remembered the painting. I looked at Mustafa and said:

- What about the magical painting? Did he leave it in his room?

Mustafa answered with disinterest:

- I imagine so.

I asked Mustafa to go to Yaqoub's house to look closely at the painting. We agreed to visit the deceased's house in the next morning. Then, I said good bye to Mustafa and left him.

I was so exhausted that night that I could not sleep. I felt a nightmare was coming on every time I fell asleep, even for a short period. I kept imagining Mustafa's story about the painting, the fisherman and his white face like paper, and the sharks.

I met Mustafa the next morning and we went together to the deceased's house. We knocked on the door and waited. We saw the door open slowly, and an old woman wearing a black wrap appeared. She looked sad. We greeted her, after we introduced ourselves as friends of the deceased. Mustafa asked her if we could see the painting inside one of the rooms. She did not mind our request. She took out a chain of keys, chose one of them, and inserted it into the lock to open it. We entered the room and went directly to the painting. It was indeed very beautiful and vivid. But I only saw the sea and the sky. I looked at Mustafa, and saw that he was also surprised. He said:

- Salem, the boat has disappeared. The boat has disappeared!

Mustafa almost collapsed. I helped him to gain strength by taking him out of the room quickly. The old woman followed us without saying anything. We were almost

in the street when we saw her closing the door behind us, but no, she was not the same old person we had seen a while ago. The person was an old man with a shining white beard and mustache, and a white face like paper.

Translation of "The Deserted Hut"

I woke up from my sleep to the intermittent ringing of the telephone. To answer it, I would have had to go from my bedroom through the long hall and then to the living room. This long walk would demolish my sleep totally, so I turned over many times on the bed hoping the phone would return to silence, but its staccato ringing continued like a machine gun destroying the quietness of the house. Eventually, the phone did stop ringing and the house became quiet again.

I felt its echo still thundering in my ear, although thankfully not for long. But the phone started ringing again. I took the pillow and covered my ear. I started to count the rings one after the other until they would finally stop. I was not disappointed. Then the telephone rang for the third time.

I got up from my bed at once, went to the living room, through the hall, turned on the lights and picked up the phone while looking at the wall clock. It was half past midnight. As soon as I put the telephone receiver close to my ear, I heard a dramatic voice on the other end of the line:

-"Mahmoud ... Mahmoud..."

I answered him with displeasure:

-"Yes! Who is this? Darwish?"

He interrupted my questions, becoming even more dramatic:

-"Excuse me, Mahmoud. I know this is a bad time to call you, but it's very important. Please come over right away -- don't waste a single minute. I am in a horrifying situation. I am so scared I can't even stand on my feet. Please come at once."

I felt as if the blood had frozen in my arteries. I asked immediately:

-"Oh my Lord. What's happened? Tell me Darwish, please."

Darwish quickly responded:

-"The matter isn't as simple as you might think. I can't explain it over the phone. Please, just come quickly. Please -- don't waste any more time because I need you."

-"I'll come right away. Just stay where you are and I'll be there in a few minutes."

I put the receiver back in to its cradle.

I jumped in my car and drove through the main streets, now empty. The bad thoughts swooped through my imagination like a falcon snatching at his prey. The green traffic lights made way for me one after the other. I asked myself constantly: what made Darwish return from his country house at his late hour? Oh God! Did something bad happen to his wife? Actually, he didn't mention her at all. Maybe she was in danger. I always hated his idea of having a country home. I always advise him to stay in the city with his wife on the weekends, because I knew that many young men go out there to have wild parties in those chateaus. And sometimes they even harass families who go there to enjoy the beach and have fun together. Were Darwish and his wife assaulted there, and if so, what have happened?

I did not want to continue imagining what could have happened to Darwish and his wife, so I decided to wait until I knew the whole truth. When I was pulling up to Darwish's house, I saw him already waiting for me at the front door. I stopped the car and walked towards him. I shook his hand silently, and I could feel that he was scared. I asked him:

-"What's going on, Darwish? Where is your wife Huda? Is she all right?"

He answered me in an unsteady and stammering voice:

-"Yes, she is all right, thank God. She is inside, except that she is as scared as I am."

I entered the room and I saw Huda sitting stiffly on the sofa, looking confused. However, she was not as shaky as Darwish.

-"Sit, Mahmoud, and listen carefully to what I am going to tell you."

He said this to me after he had calmed down a bit.

-"A murder was committed last night. I saw it in detail."

He stopped talking for a while and looked over at me to check my reaction. I felt his words roll over me like thunder. I looked at his wife and I saw her assuring me of what Darwish was saying. I looked again at Darwish and asked him hesitantly:

-"My God, Darwish, is this true?"

He answered me immediately:

-"Yes, I saw the horrible murder of a girl … and…"

I interrupted him and asked calmly:

-"Wait a moment, Darwish. Take it easy. Please tell me the details of the crime so I can understand you better."

He turned to Huda and asked her if she could bring me a glass of water. Huda got up and went to the kitchen. He looked at me and said:

-"I apologize for the way I look. I know that I must look shaken up to you. You will not believe me if I say that I have never seen in my whole life a sheep or a chicken killed the way that girl was. I saw her running away from some thugs, but they caught

her and stabbed her every way imaginable: in her stomach, in her neck, in her back and everywhere in her body."

I began to shake and I felt the shaking seize my entire body. Huda came with the water, I drank some of it and asked him intently:

-"Darwish, where did this crime occur? Have you told the police?"

He answered me at once:

-"I didn't tell anyone until now; I waited until you came so we can think together. The crime took place near the Khiran beach, close to Dawood's chateaus."

Darwish shifted his position and continued his tale in detail:

-"Mahmoud, I want you to imagine the location of the hut where the murder took place. You know that my own home is on the southern bank of the armlet that extends into the desert. If you stand in front of my place and look at the northern bank of the armlet, you will see a group of chateaus placed in front of you as rainbow, and the front doors of these chateaus face a plaza, which extends to the armlet. These are Dawood's chateaus."

I nodded my head to indicate my understanding:

-"Yes, I remember these chateaus exactly."

He continued his story after that:

-"All right, at the left of these chateaus the land extends for about a hundred meters, and after that you see Abdel Aziz Abdel Latif's chateaus."

He stopped talking for a short time, and then he asked me:

-"Are you still following me?"

I answered him with a hesitant:

-" Of course, but wait a second, Darwish. I think you forgot to mention that there is a small hut that stands alone between Dawood's and Abdel latif's chateaus?"

Darwish responded to me at once:

-"Yes, thank you. It was in front of exactly this house that the crime took place."

A moment of silence passed before the ringing of the clock declared the time, which was three in the morning. Darwish continued his story:

-"The girl came out of the hut screaming and in terror. Four men were hot on her heels, each one with a knife in his hand. They surrounded her from all sides like a group of lions surrounding their prey. Each one of them stabbed her continuously, savagely, until she fell down dead. Then they dragged her body into the hut and locked the door behind them."

I shook my head painfully as I imagined the weak girl screaming for help but unable to find anybody to save her. My eyes were full of tears and I was overwhelmed by sadness. That she was destined to die at the hands of these thugs and in such a barbaric and terrifying way. I looked at Huda and saw her hiding her face in her hands, so I said:

-" Poor Huda, she must have suffered from fear."

- "In fact, Huda was sleeping at that time inside our chateau. I was sitting alone outside enjoying the beauty of the sea; it was especially lovely because of the full moon. "

Darwish stopped for a few seconds, and looked calm when he continued:

-"After they had locked the door behind them, I got up and went extremely cautiously and carefully to wake up my wife. I told her what had happened. We snuck into the car and returned here without anybody noticing us."

I asked him in a confused tone:

-"Without anybody noticing the crime? Where were the Abdel Latifs, the Dawoods and other people who might be around at that time?"

He answered with sorrow:

-"All the chateaus beside or across from us were empty except for the one where the murder took place."

At this moment Huda lifted up her head and said in a soft voice:

-" Darwish, I think that you should call the police now."

I seconded her idea:

-"Come on Darwish, let's go to the police and tell them what's happened."

It was half past three in the morning when the police car picked us up and dashed into the empty streets. There were also some more police cars and an ambulance driving behind us, all full of policemen. The streets were almost completely empty of cars, so there was no reason for the police to use their sirens. An hour and fifteen minutes passed as we drove southbound, very fast, on a desert highway. The dune appeared and we could see its white tissues. Then we drove east down a road that angled off to one side and saw the color of the sky turn orange. And, behind the colored clouds, the sun appeared. The chateaus appeared by the sea. They were like white and black dots attached to each other in one place, and detached in other places.

The chateaus extended along the beach and curved with it for some distance. They appeared to us clearly when the car was climbing a hill on the road, and then disappeared when we descended to a low road, then they appeared again. This game of hide and seek continued until we reached the armlet when we turned left and drove along the beach for a short time. After that, the police commander ordered the cars to stop.

We all got out to organize the raid. The lieutenant ordered his men to spread their cars out and raid the hut at the same time. The police cars dashed with their loud sirens on, diverted right and then left and drove straight to the hut with a huge dust cloud rising up into the air. In seconds, the police surrounded the hut. They entered the grounds with their guns in hand, led by the lieutenant. The moment the lieutenant reached the hut door, he kicked it vigorously until it opened. Before he entered the house, he drew his own gun and went in quickly and the rest of the men followed him. Not more than a few minutes later we saw the lieutenant come out of the hut. He stood before the door and looked at Darwish as if inspecting him. Then he called to him in a very angry voice:

-"Are you sure that the crime took place here?"

Darwish turned his head towards the other bank of the beach so he could see his own chateau sitting peacefully at the shore. Then, he turned back his head towards the lieutenant and nodded his head in confirmation and said:

-"Yes, the crime happened here."

Darwish took several steps towards the beach and stopped to indicate a point on the ground.

-"Exactly on this spot."

The lieutenant shouted back angrily:

-"But I cannot see any trace of the crime, not even a drop of blood. I am also not able to see a trace of footprints except for our own."

Darwish looked to the left and then to the right. He looked as if he were assuring himself of the existence of the chateaus of Al Dawood and Abdel Latif, then he looked at the hut before him and dashed into the door after the lieutenant had cleared the way for him. He vanished inside the hut and I decided to follow him in there, escorted by an angry look from the lieutenant who whispered in my ear:

-" I think that your friend has a touch of insanity."

I looked at the lieutenant and saw sparks of anger flying from his eyes.

The hut was totally empty except for Darwish, who was circling inside it like a lunatic searching for something with one foot stuck in the sand. I came to the realization that the people who owned this hut had deserted it many years ago. There were small hills of sand piled up everywhere inside the hut. There were also some old rusted cans of food sticking up from the sand. The battered old roof was made of metal sheets that was torn apart so that you could see some of the morning light coming through them. The wooden walls were cut, weak and decayed. You can hear the wind coming through the cracks in the wooden walls, and it whistled around like

the buzzing of a bee. A board covering a window close to the door looked very old and had some nails protruding from it.

I looked at Darwish's face and I could see that he was very confused and ashamed. He looked at me hesitantly and said:

-"Something about this hut is very strange. I saw a little light coming from the window last night, and, I heard some sounds of drumbeats. I also saw the girl running outside, followed by four men who stabbed her with knife."

I looked up at the roof where I saw the metal slat shaking as a result of a strong gust of wind passing through. Then, I said a little absent-mindedly:

-"It seems to me that this hut does not look like the one that you and I know. It looks more like an old hut, which may be used by some fishermen when they need to take a break and relax.

Darwish got out of the hut quickly and walked to the lieutenant who was taking a walk near the water.

I moved closer to one of the wall's cracks and looked through it to see the outside. I saw the armlet of the sea extend further into the desert and then disappear behind the many chateaus spread along the beach. Also, there were policemen gathered around one of their cars listening and talking through the police radio. I could hear the policemen's interrupted message going back and forth. At the beach, I saw the lieutenant engaged in a heated conversation with Darwish, who appeared small before the lieutenant. Darwish was pointing out his finger to the right direction one time, and to the left the second time. The third time he pointed his finger to his private chateau,

trying to convince the stubborn lieutenant of what he saw last night. But the lieutenant listened indifferently to Darwish's fantastic tale.

After a while, I saw the police cars moving around the other chateaus to inspect them. I saw Darwish walking away from the lieutenant and coming back to the hut. I came out to meet him halfway. He looked very exhausted and immediately said:

-"I tried every way I could to convince the lieutenant of what I saw last night, but he was only sarcastic to anything I said."

I answered him as if I were trying to bring him back to consciousness:

-"Listen very carefully, Darwish, and let's be very frank about this matter. You know that nothing could be hidden from the police. If there were a crime, they would smell it from miles away, even if its traces had vanished. Now, we are standing before a deserted hut in which nobody has been in for years. Its wooden walls are torn apart, and the roof metal is rusted. You told me that you saw a faint light coming out of its window. I inspected the window and found that it has been closed for a long time. Now look, there is the beach, and the water does not reach the area in front of the hut. The only traces of life we see are those the police and our feet."

Darwish interrupted me and pointed his hand to the scene of the crime where there were large, silent rocks all tumbled together and said:

-"All you said is true, but I swear to God that I saw the murder happen on this spot."

I responded to him in a faint and sad voice:

-"I think that you were dreaming last night."

Darwish responded in a voice full of sorrow:

-"The lieutenant thought the same thing."

The lieutenant left his place at the beach and began walking towards his car, where his driver was waiting for him. As soon as the lieutenant came close to the big rocks lying on the sand, he stopped. He stared at the rocks for a while then looked at Darwish's private chateau on the other bank of the armlet. Then, he turned his sight on the hut and began to laugh loudly. He directed his discovery at me:

-"I think that your friend was imagining the whole thing. Look at these rocks piled round. They're situated right in the middle of the line of sight between the hut and the chateau that he owns. The question here becomes clear. While your friend was sitting in the dark relaxing at his place there, he thought he saw something like the rocks shaking and moving from their places, then he drew in his mind a murder, and that's all there is to it."

The lieutenant laughed again and shook his head mercifully toward my friend Darwish.

Darwish answered in a tone full of challenge:

-"But I was not sitting in the dark. The moon was full and lit the sea and the desert behind it. I was not imagining anything, sir."

The lieutenant responded to him angrily:

-"That's enough for today."

The other police cars returned from patrolling the area around the chateaus, and the lieutenant ordered their return to the city.

The atmosphere on the long ride back to the city was total silence, except for some sarcastic laughter coming from the lieutenant. Before we reached Darwish's house, the lieutenant turned his head toward the back seat and said to Darwish:

-"Don't forget to drop by the police station, in the very likely chance that I'll have to question you."

I laughed to myself at the sharp remarks of the lieutenant, while Darwish kept fuming.

Long months passed and Darwish changed dramatically. He became apathetic toward his home and particularly toward his wife. He spent long nights away from home. In fact, he became careless and absent from his home for many consecutive days. His wife had enough of that, and could not put up with the dramatic change in Darwish's behavior. They had many fights until they became an almost everyday occurrence. Many times Darwish's wife asked me to step in and help them, and I did try many times to find a solution to their problem, but all my attempts were a total failure. The relationship between Darwish and his wife became unbearable and they got a divorce, which I regretted greatly.

I heard that Darwish had made his private chateau his permanent home. His friends at work had told me that Darwish was no longer the person we used to know. In the past, he was enthusiastic and full of life, but now he is lazy and prefer, to be alone. He does not care about anything anymore. His supervisor at the company where he used to work could not put up with his laziness, so he fired him.

One afternoon I decided to visit Darwish in his chateau in the Khiran beach area. When I arrived there, I found Darwish sitting on a rock with his back to his chateau. He kept staring at the hut which lay on the other bank of the inlet. I saw that his face was becoming yellowish as a result of too little sleep. It didn't look like he was eating well, and his beard had grown thick. I came close to him and greeted him. Some time had passed and Darwish kept looking at that hut, before he turned his head toward me and gave me a look which saddened me. Later, he turned his head back to the hut and kept staring at it.

I sat beside Darwish and shared the silence with him, staring at the ill-omened hut. The ribbon of sea which separated the hut from us appeared clear and calm. In this ribbon, you could see the reflected images of the chateaus across from us, I noticed from time to time a group of small fish would come out of the water and jump in it again. The fish made wide circle waves every time they jumped into the water, and the circling waves became wider and wider until they disappeared and the water set calmly again. The horizon of the sky looked beautiful, and the sun with its soft and red color hugged the upper sky, where nobody paid it enough attention. The quietness dominated the atmosphere. A group of birds passed us and flew towards the far sky and into the red horizon. I imagined that they were speeding to get to the cloud. In the middle of that I heard Darwish saying:

-"Do you believe in ghosts?"

The question struck me painfully. It reinforced my fear that Darwish had been possessed by spirits. I looked at him and found him staring wonderingly again at that hut.

-"Yes, I believe in the existence of ghosts and everything said about them."

My answer came as a key to a secret box, which Darwish had carried in his mind all these past months. Darwish started to relax, and I saw some indication of contentment in his face. He took a deep breath as if he had finally found somebody who shared, and sympathized with, his affliction.

I continued talking:

-"I have read a lot about ghosts in books, and I have heard many stories about how they come out late at night, which makes many people believe in them and in their existence. I cannot deny what people say about them."

Darwish turned to me and asked:

-"What do they say about them?"

-"They say that ghosts are merely spirits of people who died in a horrible and unexpected way. Some of the dead people were murdered, some of them had a wall or roof fall on them, some of them fell into a deep well of water and died immediately, and some of them were burned while others were buried alive and so on. People have divided ghosts into two categories: one group of ghosts is evil and harmful, and the other one is friendly and peaceful. The evil ghosts usually remain around the place where the accident happened. They appear from time to time to frighten people. The

friendly ghosts live in remote and deserted places so they can avoid contact with people."

I noticed a sea crab crawling on the beach sand and headed for the water. In a few minutes, it disappeared beneath its surface. I continued speaking after I directed my gaze to the chateaus in front of me:

-"Why not, maybe these chateaus are suitable places for ghosts. Do you see that these chateaus are completely deserted? Their owners use them only once or twice a year. These houses are waiting for somebody to live in them because they were built for this reason, and not to be empty. Their bedrooms are yearning to have someone sleep in them, their kitchens need somebody to cook in them, their halls would love someone to walk through them. And ghosts are proliferating as a result of the increase in crime, the murder and rape of innocent people, endless human wars which kill many people who simply long for a peaceful existence. These spirits need places to live, and here we have these empty chateaus that would welcome any ghosts or spirits that would like to live in them."

I looked far away only to see the sun disappearing and leaving its red trace on the birds that passed by only a few minutes ago. I continued:

-"I heard many stories about the deserted chateaus in Kuwait... And I remember the story..."

Here, Darwish interrupted me, and asked me straight out an unexpected question:

-"Mahmoud, are you afraid of ghosts?"

I looked at him and I saw him inspecting me with his sharp eyes. Then he dug his fingers into his heavy beard. It seemed to me that he was content with what I had said and his confidence had returned to him. I laughed at his question and at first I was reluctant to answer, but finally I said to him:

-"Darwish, everybody is afraid of ghosts because he or she is expecting to see something extremely terrifying, something that would have never come to one's imagination before. Humans expect to see, for example, a skeleton walking very slowly and heavily and coming close to his prey and circling his arms around it. Then, he begins to gnaw on the prey's neck with his jagged teeth in a gaping mouth. Or, sometimes people imagine a headless human tramping slowly and heavily with his head in his hand. Another example could be a shape of a human with only a head and legs running quickly to disappear in the neighborhood junkyard."

I looked at Darwish and saw him shaking his head negatively and said:

-"At any rate, I want to assure you that I am not afraid of ghosts. On the contrary, I will be very happy to see something like a supernatural being one day."

But Darwish was not convinced by my speech. He spoke to me in an insistent tone:

-"This isn't a game or some sort of adventure. If you suspect what I am going to tell you, I can only ask you to go back to the place you came from -- right now."

I was surprised at Darwish's words. I was not expecting all these surprising questions, which he assaulted me with from the first moment I arrived. I answered him in a tone both firm and challenging:

-"I said to you that I am not afraid of ghosts or spirits."

Darwish looked at me silently and contentedly before saying:

-"Then come close to me and look carefully at that hut. Be ready to face the ghosts or the supernatural beings, as you call them. I advise you to sit still, Mahmoud. Don't be afraid, and try to discipline yourself when the ghosts appear. Refrain from talking and keep your eyelashes from moving, and even your heart from beating."

This advice hit me like a thunderstorm striking a ship lost in the middle of the sea, and eventually sinking under the mercy of crushing waves. I kept the thin piece of bravery which still remained inside me. I felt a slight of bravery which I was amazed to find that I still had, going to face the most frightening circumstance, if Darwish was right that the ghosts might appear from their hidden world and into the world of human existence. The possibility of this existence began to boil the blood in my vessels.

The moon was sending a silver beam to light the desert. The sea ribbon, which extended deep into the desert, had the shine and the shape of a sword. Behind the ribbon, the hut lay peacefully in the lap of the white sand. An extreme silence dominated the desert, and the deserted chateaus slept in this stillness. Suddenly, I saw the hut door open slightly and the moonlight shine through, lighting the entrance of the hut's door. A human figure poked its head out from the door. The head was clearly visible in the light of the moon. I saw long, abundant hair hanging around the figure and almost reaching the ground. In that first moment, I realized it was a very pale girl. She turned her head from side to side as if making sure that nobody was on the beach.

She came out of the hut and soared in the air for a while and then she dashed to the sea in a very attractive and graceful manner. I imagined her as a female fairy flying high into the air before descending lightly to touch down on the sand of the beach. I felt my hair sticking up like thorn prickles. I also felt a sharp shaking inside me which made my entire body start shivering.

The girl was really comely. She had a very shapely body, with a full chest and a thin waist visible through her loose, white dress. She moved from one place to the other with dignity and lightness. Her beautiful hair and her white thin dress flew behind her when she climbed into the air, and they slightly enveloped her body when she descended to touch the beach sand. The genie came close to the water, bending over to plunge her hands into it. She pulled out something and held it tightly to her chest with great tenderness, like a mother and her beautiful baby. After a few minutes, the female genie placed the object back into the water very carefully. Then she settled herself in the water until her body completely disappeared except for her beautiful head. The water remained calm and peaceful. The girl swam without moving the water around her. Her movements in the water were like cutting light jelly with a razor.

I noticed a thin beam of light coming out of the hut, slowly becoming stronger and stronger. I saw the shadow of a person come and go through the hut's open window. It seemed to me as if the hut took a new and different shape. The metal sheets on the roof became shiny, as did the corners of the hut, and even the old wooden window was replaced by a new and elegant frame. From time to time I could see a shadow of a

person watching over the beautiful genie girl as she was enjoying her peaceful swim. The shadow disappeared in the hut. It wasn't long before I heard the beating of the drums coming out of that hut and rising into the air.

The moment the female genie heard the drums beating, she quickly came out of the water and went to the hut, all with the same graceful movements. Her dress and her hair flew out behind her. It seemed to me as if she was not even wet from the water. She disappeared inside the hut and the door closed behind her.

The drum sound sent a beautiful rhythm into the night sky. Through the window I could see shadows dancing and twisting to the beat of the drums. I also saw a shadow of the female genie dancing in the middle of other shadows. The music continued for a while, but then it suddenly stopped. A period of heavy silence dominated the atmosphere and the light went off inside the hut. The door opened quickly and the female genie raced out of the hut and headed for the beach. She was screaming for help, and four men ran after her, each one carrying a knife. The female genie stumbled over the pile of rocks and fell to the ground. The men jumped down on top of her and attacked her with their sharp knives, tearing her body apart. Because of the horrifying murder I witnessed, I let out a powerful cry, which echoed through the desert. After that I don't remember anything.

I opened my eyes to find only Darwish sitting next to me on the bed. I saw the warm beams of the sun streaming through the hut's windows. When Darwish realized that I was alive, he began to say:

-"Now, I guess you do not think of me as crazy, after what you saw last night."

I immediately moved to sit on my bed. I asked him, while still frightened:

-"Was it true what I saw last night, or was I just dreaming?"

Darwish laughed and said:

-"Mahmoud, all that you saw was real."

Darwish started to rub his beard, gave a hearty laugh and said:

-"You scared me last night when you screamed. You made such a loud shriek that I think you even scared the ghosts."

Darwish got up and walked toward the door and said:

-"I guess we need to have some tea. Why don't you stay in bed while I go make it?"

I looked through the chateau's window and I saw the old hut recline on the sandy beach on the other bank of the armlet. In front of it, the brooding rocks looked like they were gathered around themselves. I stared for a long time at the door of the hut hoping to see the beautiful female genie again. Darwish entered the room carrying a tray, which contained two cups of tea and some biscuits. He was very happy to see me looking at the hut through the window. While placing the tray on the bed, he said to me:

-"You became hysterical last night. I watched over you all night long, and used a cold cloth on your face to try to calm you down."

I looked at him and asked him eagerly:

-"Tell me for God's sake. Does this tragedy happen every night?"

-"No, Mahmoud. It only happens three nights every lunar month. More precisely, the ghosts appear on the nights of the thirteenth, the fourteenth, and fifteenth of each lunar month, especially when the moon is rising ..."

I interrupted his explanation:

-"The thirteenth, the fourteenth, and the fifteenth of each lunar month... look... but today is the fourteen of the month, which means the murder we saw will surely repeat itself again tonight."

Darwish smiled as he answered:

-"Yes, Mahmoud. Do you intend to stay with me again tonight?"

I screamed in his face and said:

-"Never Darwish!! Don't you see that poor girl is being tortured three times every month?"

Darwish was obviously uncomfortable and changed the subject, saying in a rather soft voice:

-"Do you remember, Mahmoud, that day when the police came here to search for the supposed corpse, and they returned empty-handed? I felt unbearably guilty at that time, and could not forgive myself until I investigated this matter further. I was not imagining things, nor was I dreaming. So, I returned to my chateau and began spending many hours watching that hut from this spot. Until the thirteenth day of the lunar month came. Then I saw everything repeat itself before my eyes, again on the fourteenth day, and once more on the following day, the fifteenth. The other days the hut remains quiet."

I asked Darwish in a confused tone:

-"But why has this crime scene gone unnoticed by anyone except us? I know that there are many families who come here to spend time in their chateaus, sometimes during the full moon nights."

-"Mahmoud, I think what you are saying makes sense, but because I have spent so much time here, I have noticed that the owners of these chateaus rarely come here except on Thursdays and Fridays. On one moonlit night, I saw some of Abel Latif's female relatives walking along the beach in front of the hut at the same time as the female genie dashed in her very graceful way toward the sea. She walked right through the women without anyone noticing her at all. Also, at the same time, the drum sounds were very loud and none of the women seemed to have heard anything."

Darwish took a biscuit and stuck it into the tea, bit part of it and continued his story:

-" I'm not exaggerating when I say that the women were sitting and conversing when the female genie came out from the water and walked straight through them without any one seeing her. The women stayed at the beach even when the dancing reached its height in the hut. When the horrifying murder took place close to them, it was as if they were blind."

When I heard this story I got up suddenly and took Darwish's hand. I pressed hard on his fingers and yelled at him:

-"Don't you see that this girl is crying for your help, Darwish?! In fact, she was crying for our help, and that's why she only appears to us, making other people, and

especially those women, not able to see her. She needs our help. I can't imagine that her crying hasn't touched you. But it looks to me as if you have sold out your human consciousness. It seems like you are enjoying watching a crime whose victim is this poor girl. I can't understand how you are able to sit here and watch that … Darwish, she needs us desperately."

Darwish answered me with some confusion:

-"But how?"

I answered him in a rage, and while one of my hands still crushed his fingers, I pointed with my other hand to the hut which was clearly visible through the window:

-"Do you know that I am starting to believe that a real crime happened in that hut, and that the victim was that girl? It all happened on a night when the moon was at its brightest. We have both seen the details of the crime exactly as they happened the first time, but there is still one thing left to do."

Darwish looked at me admiringly and said:

-"And what is that?"

-"We have to look for the corpse, and I think that it is still buried under that hut."

Darwish replied slowly, looking very uncomfortable:

-"You mean …"

I interrupted him at once:

-" Yes, I mean the girl must be buried there and I believe that her spirit is lurking around her corpse. Her spirit wants to be free from her body and that's why her soul is imprisoned here."

Then I continued in a quiet tone:

-"Look Darwish... As you might know, I have read many books about ghosts and spirits. And I know that the spirit of a murder victim will not leave the place where the corpse is buried until someone washes it, buries it and prays for it as at any proper funeral. I assure you, my friend, that the corpse is still buried under that hut. We only have to dig up the sand in order to find it."

I pulled Darwish to his feet and told him quickly:

-"Don't look at me like that. Now let's go."

We left the chateau to look for digging tools.

We stepped tentatively into the hut and decided to dig in the middle of it. We were silent during the digging except for the sound of the tools cutting through the sand. It didn't take us long to dig a big hole in the floor of the hut. We used our hands to dig further, and before much time had passed my hand struck something hard. I dug deeper, only to see a white thing, which looked very much like a bone. I called for Darwish and he came to help me dig and get the sand away from the hole. We found many of these bones, and a lot of hair. After hard digging we finally found the entire human body. I looked at it and saw some skin attached to parts of the bones in places, and the rest was a long white skeleton. Behind the skull, we saw a huge pile of hair, with some of it extending down to the legs and then into the sand.

Darwish gazed at me with looks that were a mixture of shock and contentment and said to me:

-"Here she is, the poor girl."

We stayed for a while, staring at the poor girl's skeleton. Then, Darwish left the hut and sat sadly by the beach. With unconscious movements, he started throwing some small rocks far into the water. I left the hut, feeling deep sadness in my stomach, and sat down beside Darwish. I saw the tears in his eyes, then he started to talk to me in a broken voice:

-"Do you pray, Mahmoud?"

I answered him while I was looking at the circled waves made by one of the small rocks from Darwish's hand:

-"Yes. But the prayers for dead people are different."

He answered me nervously:

-"Good deeds come from good intentions."

I said to him with some doubt:

-"Do you mean we should pray for a dead person with regular prayers?"

-"Yes, I mean that exactly, and after that we will call the police

-"I can do that."

The policemen stood around the hole staring at the corpse in deathly silence. The lieutenant stepped up to Darwish and patted his shoulder regretfully. The usual procedures took place. They took up the corpse and got into their police cars, going back to the city. But Darwish insisted on staying one more night to confirm my analysis. The fifteenth night of the lunar month passed without him seeing anything.

Over the next days, Darwish went into the police station every once in a while for further investigation. He found out that the crime had happened nine years before, and

that the police had still not discovered the killers until the moment of my writing this story, which is as Mahmoud asked me to narrate it.

Endnotes

[1] Qasim, "The Deserted Hut", 170.

[2] Merriam-Webster Incorporated. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Tenth Edition. M.A: Springfield, 1999.

[3] *The Columbia Encyclopedia*: Sixth Edition. 2000.

[4] J. A. Cuddon. *Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books Publishing, 1989. 879 for the supernatural story, 342 for the ghost story, and, 388 for the horror story. From now on, I will refer to Cuddon in the text by providing his name and the page number.

[5] Arthur Woodhouse. *Milton the poet*. Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1955.

[6] Thomas Green. *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*. England: Oxford, ABS-CLIOINC, 1997. W. K. McNeil. 632. Also, W. K. McNeil. *Southern Folk Ballads*. Little Rock: August House, 1987.

[7] W. K. McNeil also gives references to Katharine Briggs. *British Folktales*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977. 'And, Jan Harold Brunvand. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends* and *Their Meanings*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1981. 254

[8] Pamela Search. *The Supernatural in the English Short Story*. London: B. Hanison Press, 1959. 4. From now on I will mention Search in the text by providing page number.

[9] Jennifer Westwood. *Gilgamesh and other Babylonian Tales*. London: Bodley Head Press, 1968. 21.

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[11] Marjorie M. Balzer. *Shamanic Worlds : Rituals and Lore of Siberia and Central Asia*. New York: North Castle Books, 1997. 118.

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[13] John Maier. *Gilgamesh: A Reader*. Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci

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[16] Husain Haddawy. *The Arabian Nights*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990. 8.

[17] Fatme Sharafeddine Hassan, *Al-Mashriq*. Vol.1 No.2. Dec 1995. Fatme Hassan is currently a professor of Arabic Language and Culture at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

[18] Husain Haddawy. *The Arabian Nights*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990. The Sixty-Fifth Night. 138.

[19] Helmut Gätje. *The Qur'an and its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations*. Translated from the German and edited by Alford T. Welch. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976. 83.

[20] Muhammad Hamidullah. *Introduction to Islam*. Centre Culturel Islamique. Paris, 1969. 23. Also, information on this subeject would be found in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, under heading: snake, jinn..

[21] Peter Alexander. *Hamlet: Father and Son*. Oxford Clarendon, 1955. Also, P. J. Aldus: *Mousetrap: Structure and Meaning in Hamlet*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1977. Also, Thomas McFarland, *Tragic Meanings in Shakespeare*. New York: Random House, 1966.

[22] Helen Stewart. *The Supernatural in Shakespeare*. London: John Ouseley Pess, 1908. 34.

[23] Louis W. Rogers. *The Ghosts in Shakespeare: A Study of the Occultism in the Shakespeare Plays*. Chicago: Theo Book Co., 1925. 21.

[24] Charles Edward Whitmore. *The Supernatural in Tragedy*. New York: P. P. Appel, 1971. 73.

[25] Jim Rimmer. *Charles Dickens A Christmas Carol*. Introduction by Crispin Elsted. New Westminster, B.C: Pie Tree P, 1998.

[26] Dorothy Scarborough. *The Supernatural in Modern Fiction*. New York: Octagon Books Inc, 1967. 2. From now on, I will refer to Scarborough in the text by providing her name and the page number.

[27] Lewis Carroll. *Through the Looking Glass*. New York: World Publishing Company, 1960. 200. Nevertheless, Carroll's *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*, and *Through the Looking Glass*, are works which are considered to be part of the fantastic. I have chosen this passage only to highlight the degree of impact on humans when they first interact with the supernatural, fantastic or even a ghost. Please notice the bold words and their implications. The works also offer a good example of narratives permitting readers escaping everyday realtiy.

[28] Qasim K.Qasim.. *Madinatt Al-Reyaah wa Qissas Okhra an Al-Arwaah wa Al-Ashbaah*. [*The City of Winds and other Stories of the Ghosts and Spirits.*] Kuwait: That Al Salasil Publishing House, 1978.

[29] *Kuwaiti Writers Association*. Association Newsletter. Nov 1982.

[30] Rashied Al-Hamad. "Al Qissah." *Al-Qabas* Newspaper. 14 Jan. 1984: 19.

[31] "Adaab." *Egyptian Ministry of Culture*: Publications of Literature. Sep. 1988.

[32] *The Kuwaiti National Council for Culture, Arts, and Literature*. Kuwait: May, 1987.

[33] Hasan El-Shamey. *Folktales of Egypt*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

[34] Stith Thompson. *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*. Indiana, Indiana U.P.1956. **E299**. Ghost return. **E200.** Malevolent return from the dead. **E231.** Return from dead to reveal murder. "The Deserted Hut". Ernest Baughman. *Type and motif- index of the Folktales of England and North America*. Indiana:

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E230. Return from dead to inflict punishment. And, E236- Return from dead to demand stolen property. "The Golden Necklace". Feilberg, H. F. *Bidrag til en ordbog over Jyske Almuesmal*. Four Volumes. Kobenhaun, 1886-1914. Also, Balys Index No.3565.

E235.2. Ghost returns to demand proper burial. "The Deserted Hut". Tom Cross. *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature*. Indiana: Kraw Reprint, Folk-lore, a Quarterly Review of Myth, Tradition, Institution, and Custom. II 26. Also, J. A. MacCulluch. *Religion of the Ancient Celt.Edinburgh*, 1911. 340.

E238. Dinner with the dead. Dead man is invited to dinner, takes his host to other world. This motif is also used in Qasim's short story "The Weird Visitor".

A1120. Establishment of present order: winds. Dov Neuman. *Motif-Index to the Talmudic-Midrashic Literature*. Jewish myth. Indiana University- Ph.D. Thesis, Micro Film Service. Ann Arbor Michigan, 1954.

A1122. Cave of winds originally confined in caves. Roman myth. Virgil's *The Aeneid* I. lines 52. Also, is a Siberian myth. Uno Holmberg. Der Baum des Lebens. Annales Academia Seientiarum Fennicae. (xb1.b) Helsinki, 1922-3.

Z115. Wind personified. Jewish myth and culture. Dov Neuman. *Motif-Index to the Talmudic-Midrashic Literature*. Jewish myth. Indiana University- Ph.D. Thesis, Micro Film Service. Ann Arbor Michigan, 1954.

A1067. Extraordinary wind at end of the world. Jewish myth. Enriquez Moreno. Maria de Los Angelos. Motivos de Narracion Tradcionales en Loslibros de Esdras. (Anuario de la Sociedad Folkoria de Mexico. VI 7-45.) Mexico, 1947.

F963. Extraordinary behavior of Wind. Helden Irishe. Und Konig Sage bis Zum Siebzehnten Jahrhundert. Rudolf Thurneysen. Teil I und II. Halle a. s., 1921.

A139.8.4. God of wind in shape of kite. Hawaii myth. Martha Beckwith. *Hawaiian Mythology*. New Hoven, 1940.

A1126. Escape from deluge on foot. (At the end of Qasim's short story "The City

of Winds", the main character Abdullah escapes in foot from winds to his car.) Chinese myth. Wolfram Eberhard. *Chinese Fairy Tales and Folk Tales.* London, 1937.

A282. Wind-god. Greek myth. George Grote. *History of Greece.* Volume. III. London, 1888.

A287.01. Rain-god and Wind-god brought back in order to make livable weather. Have been banished by Sun-god. Indian myth. Thompson-Balys= Stith Thompson and Jones Balys. *Motif and Type Index of the Oral Tales of India.* Bloomington, Indiana In Press (Ind.)

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D906. Magic wind. African myth. Also used in *The Golden Bough* I. 119ff. P. A. Talbot. *In the Shadow of the Bush.* New York and London, 1912.

V11.5. Sacrifices to wind. Greek myth. Also, in Euripides. I Phigenia at Aulis. This motif is also used by Qasim, "The City of Winds". James Hastings. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.* 12 Volumes. New York, 1908-22.

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F402.3. City of demons. Jewish myth. Also in Bin Borion *Born Judas* I 229. M.J. Bin Gorion. *Der Born Judas: Legenden, Marchen und Erzahlungen.* 6 volumes. Leipzig, 1918ff. (Vols. 1-4 cited are second edition, 5 and 6 are first edition).

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D812. Magic object received from supernatural being. This is a folkloric motif used by Qasim in the "The Painting of Wishes" Japanese myth, Ikeda..Also in Victor Chauvin. V78. No. 22n. 1.

D1310. Magic object gives supernatural information. This is also a folkloric motif used by Qasim in the "The Painting of Wishes". Also, magic knowledge. Indian myth. Thompsons-Bayles.

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[37] Edger A. Poe. *The Oval Portrait.* New York: Grosset and Dunlap Publishing, 1993. 136

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[66] For more thorough information Arabic women and their social status,

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I- PRIMARY WORKS.

II- WORKS IN ENGLISH ABOUT ARABIC LITERATURE AND ISLAM.

III- GENERAL WORKS.

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